

“I Have A Dream” Foundation to Honor Legacy of Eugene Lang at “Spirit of the Dream” Gala

Honorees include Roger Staubach, Pro Football Hall of Fame Quarterback; the Honorable David N. Dinkins, 106th Mayor of New York City; & “I Have A Dream” alumnus Elda Sawyer

New York, NY, (June 1, 2017)—On Tuesday, June 6th, the “I Have A Dream” Foundation will celebrate its annual “Spirit of the Dream” Gala at the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum in New York City. This year’s honorees are: **Pro Football Hall of Fame Quarterback and philanthropist Roger Staubach** with the Eugene M. Lang Lifetime Achievement Award; **106th Mayor of New York City the Honorable David N. Dinkins** with the inaugural David N. Dinkins Social Justice Award, to be presented by **Loida Nicolas-Lewis**; and Dreamer Alumnus **Elda Sawyer** with the “Spirit of the Dream” Award.

“It is an honor to be presented the Eugene M. Lang Lifetime Achievement Award,” shared Roger Staubach. “Eugene Lang showed us all how one action can have a lasting impact for generations to come—but giving every child an equal opportunity to succeed takes long-term commitment. I’m proud to be supporting Mr. Lang’s legacy as we work towards a world where all children can attain a college education and pursue their dreams.”

David N. Dinkins, 106th Mayor, City of New York, says, “I am humbled and proud to have this social justice award in my name. I hope that, together with the important work of the ‘I Have A Dream’ Foundation, I may help inspire a new generation of community leaders so that the children of today enjoy a brighter future filled with promise and opportunity.”

Elda Sawyer, an alumnus of the “I Have A Dream” Foundation - Los Angeles, drew from her own experiences as a first generation college student to study child development and become a mentor to children in underserved communities—first as an “I Have A Dream” Program Director in Boyle Heights, and now supporting children and families in the Sulphur Springs Union School District in Santa Clara, California.

“Being a Dreamer gave me opportunities I would not have otherwise had access to—growing up, my parents worked three jobs to provide for our family and give us access to an education they did not have. But we still had limited resources. ‘I Have A Dream’ opened up a new world—quite literally—from college visits to exchange programs in China and New Zealand,” said Sawyer. “Even when things were hard, balancing school, work, and caring for siblings, I always had a support system to turn to. And now I am proud to be able to give back to my community.” Sawyer, who is married to a fellow Dreamer and now has three children of her own, says “I have a beautiful life thanks to ‘I Have A Dream.’”

This year’s gala will feature a special tribute to founder Eugene M. Lang, who passed on April 9th of this year at the age of 98. “Thanks to the vision of Eugene Lang over 35 years ago, we have been able to provide nearly 18,000 children with the opportunity to pursue the dream of higher education,” says Donna Lawrence, President & CEO of the “I Have A Dream” Foundation. “We owe the work we do every day to Mr. Lang, and our work will not be complete until every child has an equal opportunity to succeed in school, college, and career. We know Mr. Lang’s legacy will continue to have a tremendous impact on the lives of so many of us for generations to come.”

The “I Have A Dream” Foundation began in 1981 when businessman Eugene M. Lang returned to the elementary school he had attended 50 years earlier, P.S. 121 in East Harlem, to address the graduating sixth grade class. He intended to tell the students, "work hard and you'll succeed." But on the way to the podium, the school principal informed Lang that three-quarters of the school's students would probably never even finish high school, inspiring Mr. Lang to make an impromptu change to his speech: he promised college tuition to every sixth grader who stayed in high school and graduated.

However, Mr. Lang soon realized that financial support alone would not be enough to guarantee the success of these students, and he hired Johnny Rivera to support them from day to day. Johnny was the first Program Director in what would soon become the "I Have A Dream" Foundation. Since then, the Foundation has served nearly 18,000 students, called “Dreamers,” providing a comprehensive program of social, emotional, and educational support to students from low-income communities on their journey from elementary school all the way through college. The “I Have A Dream” Foundation is now active in 16 cities in the U.S. and New Zealand.

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About “I Have A Dream” Foundation:

The “I Have A Dream” Foundation (IHDF) is a leading education nonprofit focused on breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty through a comprehensive program of support that follows the same group of young people (“Dreamers”) from elementary school all the way through college. Founded 35 years ago through the vision of Eugene Lang, IHDF operates in 16 cities and has served nearly 18,000 Dreamers.

The numbers: 51% of students in U.S. public schools—over 25 Million children—are low-income, and only 9% of low-income students earn a bachelor’s degree, compared to 77% of their high-income peers. 90% of Dreamers complete high school, compared to 70% of their low-income peers, representing an additional \$2.9 Billion in earnings over their lifetimes. Dreamers are nearly 3 times more likely to earn a bachelor’s degree than their low-income peers. Without this level of support, the cycle of poverty continues: 65% of children whose parents have no more than a high school diploma live in poverty. Now, over 35 years after Eugene M. Lang’s life changing promise, Dreamers have children who are attending college themselves.

Visit ihaveadreamfoundation.org to learn more.

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