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UPR Río Piedras alum receives medal of honor from NASA [1]

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In the picture, Julie Ann Rivera Pérez with Puerto Rican astronaut Joseph Acabá.

2014 was a year of triumphs for Puerto Rican Julie Ann Rivera Pérez, who received a medal of honor from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and was selected to participate in a very competitive leadership program in the agency.

Rivera Perez earned the Medal of Equal Employment from NASA for promoting diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities for the Hispanic community through her initiatives as president of the Hispanic Advisory Committee for Employees (HACE) for the past two years. In addition, leadership and job performance earned her a coveted seat in the NASA First Program, whose purpose is to identify and train the future leaders of the agency.

"I am extremely happy. It was worth all the sacrifice and commitment I have put into this work, " said the project contracting officer of the staellite project GOES-R at the Goddard Space Flight Center (GSFC) in Maryland. The Puerto Rican began working at NASA after graduating in 2010

from the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras (UPR-RP), with a double major in Marketing and Human Resources.

"I love my job," said the official, who after her work day and the HACE meetings enjoys singing, dancing and acting in the Music and Drama Club at Goddard Aerospace Center.

Rivera Pérez highlighted the diverse and inclusive environment, both in terms of race and gender at the agency, which was chosen as the number one workplace in the federal government for the second consecutive year. "We believe that diversity is where innovation and development of ideas exist," explained Rivera who was also recognized by the initiative Women @ NASA in 2013.

However, this stellar career at NASA has not been without challenges. "In the workplace there are always challenges, that is how you learn from other people and from work itself. But for me the biggest challenge has been my health, " said Rivera, who after moving to the United States was diagnosed with chronic neutropenia and Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (EDS), incurable conditions.

"That to me has truly been the biggest challenge, how to deal with my career and my professional success and manage these diseases," she said. Despite her difficult situation, Pérez Rivera hopes that other students find some strength through her history, "you know that your story can also inspire and help someone else who is going through a difficult time. Everyone has inside their hearts the strength to make another human being feel good, " she said.

From UPR-RP to NASA

The graduate of the Faculty of Business Administration is one of several alumni of the UPR-RP currently working at NASA. As a student of Human Resources and Marketing, Rivera Pérez never imagined she would work for the space agency. Like other students, she started working at the agency through internship programs.

The former president of the National Society of Collegiate Scholars (NSCS) was in the midst of a Campus choir rehearsal when a friend informed her that NASA was recruiting students from the Business Administration Faculty for an internship. She ran out of the room to sign up for the interviews, getting the last spot. In January 2009 she completed her internship and after graduating in 2010 received a full time position. She still maintains a bond with the faculty, informing the ENLACE project of employment and internship opportunities for students at NASA.

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