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*Diane Portnoy*

*President and CEO*

## **Immigrant entrepreneurs honored for their economic, social and scientific contributions in Massachusetts**

MALDEN, Mass, May 10, 2012 / Three Massachusetts business owners were honored last night at The Immigrant Learning Center's Immigrant Entrepreneur Awards Dinner at the Royal Sonesta Hotel in Cambridge, Mass. The event highlighted the outstanding contributions of the three award winners, the 21 nominees and the thousands of immigrant entrepreneurs across the Commonwealth. The awards were presented by master of ceremonies Richard A. Davey, Jr., secretary and CEO of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation and ILC board trustee; Diane Portnoy, founder and CEO of The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. (ILC); and Marcia Drew Hohn, director of The ILC's Public Education Institute.

Larry Dossantos, founder of 912 Auto Center in Dorchester, received the award for Outstanding Neighborhood business. Immigrant entrepreneurs play an important role in revitalizing and stabilizing urban neighborhoods. Dossantos, a native of Cape Verde, founded 912 Auto Center 27 years ago to provide needed automotive services to the community. More recently, he modified his business practices to include recycling, energy-efficiency, using eco-friendly paints and installing a rooftop garden. His efforts in the community include building community gardens and launching a neighborhood advisory group for minority business owners. Dossantos thanked his wife and his sister saying, "They say that every successful man has a strong woman behind him. I'm proud to have two strong women behind me."

Julia Silverio, founder of Silverio Insurance Agency in Lawrence, received the award for Outstanding Business Growth. Silverio, a native of the Dominican Republic, founded her business out of her home in 1984 to provide translation, tax, insurance and travel services to the Latino population in Lawrence. Immigrant entrepreneurs often step in to fill niches and their business growth provides valuable jobs and tax revenues. Silverio Insurance Agency's revenue grew an impressive 56 percent from 2009 to reach \$2.5 million in 2011.

Silverio thanked The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. for, "the great job they have been doing promoting immigrants as assets to America, especially during these hard times when being an immigrant sometimes is frowned upon." She also congratulated the other nominees saying, "We came to this country in pursuit of the American dream and a better life for ourselves and our families. And, just by that mere fact, we are all winners."

Amar Sawhney, founder of several high-tech businesses, received the award for Outstanding Science/Technology business. Immigrants represent a disproportionately large segment of advanced degree holders in science, technology, engineering and math as well as U.S. patent holders and founders of high-tech businesses. Sawhney, a native of India, has generated more than 100 patents and founded five high-tech businesses in Massachusetts. He is currently the CEO of Ocular Therapeutix in Bedford and Augmenix in Waltham. Ocular Therapeutix is developing drug-delivery systems to greatly enhance the treatment of glaucoma. Augmenix is developing ways to improve outcomes for cancer radiotherapy patients.

Sawhney said of his success, “I don’t think any of this could have happened in most other countries. The United States is singularly accepting of entrepreneurs, providing a fertile ground on which to grow the seed of creativity and create wonderful ventures. So, for this adopted homeland I am very grateful.”

**About The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc.**

The Immigrant Learning Center, Inc. (ILC) of Malden, Mass, is a not-for-profit organization that helps immigrants and refugees become successful workers, parents and community members through direct service programs and public education. Our direct service program provides free, year-round English classes to immigrant and refugee adults in Greater Boston. The ILC further supports immigrants through the Public Education Institute, which informs Americans about the economic and social contributions of immigrants in our society. For more information, visit the website <http://www.ilctr.org> and Facebook page <http://www.fb.com/ImmigrantLearningCenter>.

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