



Helping Baltimore's Latino Immigrants



Lanaea Featherstone, whose friends describe her as “Latina in the heart,” is a co-founder of the William & Lanaea C. Featherstone Foundation, a nonprofit organization focused on expanding opportunities for Baltimore’s Latino immigrants. *Courtesy of Lanaea C. Featherstone*

When Latino immigrants in Baltimore want to improve their job skills or give something back to their communities, they can turn to the William & Lanaea C. Featherstone Foundation, a nonprofit organization that offers free training programs and opportunities for community service.

Lanaea Featherstone established the foundation in 2008 with her

husband, William. “My Spanish-speaking friends say that I am ‘Latina del corazón’ — Latina in the heart,” she said. “I’m African-American, but have a passion for Latin American culture, people, food, dance — and their language. I really believe it is so important to embrace other cultures.”

Featherstone is a fluent Spanish speaker who has a master’s degree in Spanish and Latin American

studies and a bachelor’s degree in broadcast journalism. She manages the foundation’s day-to-day operations, while her husband handles the foundation’s business affairs.

Changing Lives

One of the foundation’s success stories is a computer literacy program developed in partnership with the telecommunications giant Verizon. The program

provided 12 Latino immigrants from Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico and Puerto Rico with computer skills and, at the end of the course, computers for their homes.

Only a few of the participants "had home access to a computer before the course," Featherstone said. They learned to use the Internet to complete job applications, communicate through email and search for information. "That's transformative."

"One student, with tears in his eyes, said that the first day of the program was one of the best days of his life," Featherstone said. "One of our trainers from Puerto Rico said, 'It was amazing! I knew we were going to change lives. ... I just did not expect to hear it after one class. ... It speaks volumes of the need and eagerness to learn in the Latino community.'"

The foundation's website describes some of its other free programs: English as a second language, how to navigate the U.S. citizenship process and after-school mentoring by Spanish-speaking experts in mathematics, English, grammar, reading and science. Another project arranges for Latino immigrants to donate their skills (construction, carpentry and other services) to improve their local communities.

Working with the foundation "is such a humbling and rewarding experience," Featherstone said. "I learn so much from our students. It is really a two-way street."



Latin immigrants participate in the William & Lanaea C. Featherstone Foundation's computer literacy course. Attendees from Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico and Puerto Rico learned to use the Internet to communicate, find information and complete online job applications. The foundation also gave participants computers for their homes.

Courtesy of Lanaea C. Featherstone