

# FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

## Quiñones Will Share Compelling Story of Perseverance at Ferris Foundation Benefit

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John Quiñones was 13 years old when he and his family traveled 1,500 miles from their home in the barrio of San Antonio to northern Michigan to pick cherries for 75 cents a bucket.



From there, they headed to Ohio to pick tomatoes.

"I'll never forget my father saying, 'Do you want to do this for the rest of your life, or do you want to get an education?'" Quiñones said. "That was a no-brainer."

But he didn't know how to make that happen. None of his family members had attended college. When he was younger, he shined shoes to help his parents make ends meet. His father worked as a janitor and did lawn care for extra money, and his mother cleaned houses. Although his family had lived in the United States for six generations, Quiñones spoke only Spanish until he was 6 years old and started attending school.

He grew up in segregation, was pressured by gangs in his poor neighborhood and steered by teachers and school counselors into vocational programs for auto mechanics or wood shop. He was teased about his accent. But encouragement from his parents and a high school teacher, who recognized his talent for writing, fueled Quiñones' desire to attend college and pursue a career in journalism.

Today, Quiñones is a seven-time Emmy Award-winning ABC news correspondent and host of the network's popular TV series "What Would You Do?," who encourages others to pursue their dreams regardless of socioeconomic barriers. He will bring his message of perseverance to the 15th annual Ferris Foundation for Excellence Benefit on Friday, Nov. 1 at DeVos Place in downtown Grand Rapids.

Quiñones is the keynote speaker for the event, which supports Foundation efforts to provide scholarship assistance to students as well as financial support for faculty study and service.

"If it had not been for (organizations) like The Ferris Foundation that gives kids opportunities, I would not be where I am today," Quiñones said. "When you're given a helping hand, you're better equipped to make it. That's never been as important as it is today."

Quiñones will discuss the role education played in his success. After graduating from high school, he entered Upward Bound, a federally funded educational program that prepares students for college. He went on to earn a bachelor's degree in speech communication from St. Mary's University in San Antonio, and a master's degree from Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism in New York.

He persisted in his goal to be a reporter and landed a series of local news internships and jobs. He even eliminated his accent. But it was his perfect English and Spanish fluency that eventually attracted the attention of television news organizations.

After he graduated from Columbia, Quiñones was hired at Chicago's WBBM-TV. A report he did about the plight of illegal immigrants – that included swimming across the Rio Grande himself – won an Emmy and a job offer from ABC. He has been with the network for nearly 30 years.

“(That story) showed me that’s the kind of journalism I want to do – to shine a light on the darkest corners of the world,” Quiñones said. “I get a chance to tell give a voice to people who don’t have one.”

During his tenure with ABC, Quiñones has reported on a wide range of stories from all over the world. He spent most of the 1980s covering the conflicts in Central America for “World News Tonight” and was one of the few American journalists who reported from Panama City during the U.S. invasion in December 1989. He also was the first of 2,000 journalists to get an exclusive interview with a survivor of the 2010 Chilean Mining Disaster.

While he still reports for ABC, his work for the hidden-camera show “What Would You Do?” captures the way people react when confronted with dilemmas that compel them to take action or walk away. The show debuted in 2008 and remains one of the highest-rated newsmagazine franchises ever.

Quiñones hopes sharing the story of his personal struggle to persevere and realize his career goal will inspire others.

“I took advantage of every opportunity I had, and I never took no for an answer,” he said. “That’s what I try to impress upon young people. Never take no for an answer, despite what society might tell you and how hard things might get. Anything is possible in this country. There is still racism. There are still obstacles. It’s changing, but it’s still there, and there is work to be done

“I want students to know that whatever their dreams are, they can realize them.”

“Given the Opportunity, ‘What Would You Do?’” is the theme of the Foundation’s 2013 event, which will highlight its student scholarship winners and merit grant recipients

whose work has significant educational and outreach potential.

The black-tie-optional event will begin with cocktails and a VIP reception for sponsors with Quiñones at 5:30 p.m. Dinner will be served at 7 p.m., followed by the program at 8 p.m.

Wolverine Power Marketing Cooperative (WPMC) is the title sponsor of the 2013 Ferris Foundation for Excellence Benefit. WPMC, headquartered in Cadillac, is an Alternative Electric Supplier licensed by the Michigan Public Service Commission to participate in the state's electric choice market. Ferris has been a member since 2003.

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