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Laurier associate professor named one of 10 most influential Hispanic Canadians

WATERLOO – A Wilfrid Laurier University associate professor of Spanish has been named one of this year’s 10 most influential Hispanic Canadians.

[Mercedes Rowinsky-Geurts](#), an award-winning teacher and extensively published researcher in Laurier’s [Department of Languages and Literatures](#), received the honour at a gala Nov. 21 in Toronto. The award was presented by the [Canadian Hispanic Business Alliance](#) in partnership with the **Canadian Hispanic Congress**, **TD Canada Trust** and a number of other sponsors.

“Of all the awards I’ve received, this is of special importance to me because it comes from the community,” said Rowinsky-Geurts. “It’s important, for us as immigrants who come to Canada, to showcase that this is a country that gives you immense opportunities. With hard work – it doesn’t come easy – you can make it, have an impact on society and give back.”

The awards recognize influential Hispanic-Canadians from across Canada, representing a wide range of fields of endeavour. Since 2007, the awards have recognized 100 people in seven provinces, representing 17 countries of origin. They have included artists, researchers, community advocates and professionals.

Rowinsky-Geurts, who joined Laurier in 1994, was an early pioneer in developing technologized **active learning classrooms** at Laurier. In 2008, she won a **3M National Teaching Fellowship**, Canada’s most prestigious university teaching award. She has received and been nominated for a long list of [other teaching awards](#). She has also won awards for [textbook development](#), research, translation, literary criticism and poetry.

“At Laurier, we say that we inspire lives of leadership and purpose and I think my example of life as a Hispanic-Canadian can inspire other people to follow through with their dreams,” said Rowinsky-Geurts. “Sometimes as a woman with an accent, coming from another country, you have a lot of obstacles to achieving your goals. To me, Laurier has been the perfect place to develop my career because people are not just numbers. It’s an amazing place where you bring ideas forward and the institution supports you. I feel really blessed.”

Rowinsky-Geurts knows hard work and perseverance from personal experience. She was born and raised in Uruguay and became an elementary school teacher. In the years that followed a 1973 military coup, many of her friends were persecuted for opposing the dictatorship. She and her family decided to leave.

There was a lot to get used to in Canada when she arrived in January 1976. Though she had studied English in Uruguay, speaking it every day while negotiating a different culture was difficult, and her studies in Uruguay were not recognized.

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As a single mother in her 30s, Rowinsky-Geurts started studying for a Canadian bachelor's degree with the goal of requalifying as a teacher. To support her children, she worked nights, running her own small business cleaning offices.

Despite the hard work, Rowinsky-Geurts found she loved and excelled at her academic studies. After completing her bachelor's degree, she decided to continue on to a master's, then to a PhD. She began teaching Spanish at Laurier in 1994, during the last year of her doctoral studies. In 1997, she secured a tenure-track position.

"I'm grateful every time I go into the classroom," said Rowinsky-Geurts. "I not only feel blessed for the chance I received at Laurier to be the best I can be, but also for the chance to give back and teach students to overcome their obstacles."

Learn More

- [Canadian Hispanic Business Alliance 10 Most Awards Program](#)
- [TD's 10 most influential Hispanic Canadians named](#) (Canadian Hispanic Business Alliance news release)

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