

At home in Piñataville: SUNY Broome student turns folk art into business

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Veronica Carrasquillo stood at the podium, and slowly made her way through her pitch for Piñataville N.Y.

“I make and sell handmade piñatas for all ages — infusing the old with a modern twist,” she said, as images appeared on the screen behind her: colorful superheroes, an upside-down monkey eating a banana, clowns, an electric guitar.

Another image appeared: a brilliantly decorated sugar skull, emblematic of Mexico’s Day of the Dead and the company’s logo, which will be featured on a variety of merchandise. The piñatas themselves are environmentally friendly and 100 percent recyclable, and can be made to order. They’re even available at a local store: Imagicka in downtown Binghamton.

“Piñatas are part of bringing the community together,” she concluded, after outlining plans for the future that include creating promotional material and projected growth.

Carrasquillo was honing her presentation for the sixth annual New York Business Plan Competition April 24 in Albany, one of two SUNY Broome students to attend this year. And while neither ultimately placed in the competition, they had the opportunity to pitch their ideas to judges who included venture capitalists, angel investors, investment bankers, other public and private investors, and experienced entrepreneurs.

Carrasquillo, who is working on her Certificate in Entrepreneurship, overcame numerous obstacles on her path to higher education.



Veronica Carrasquillo and Laura Knochen-Davis

Overcoming obstacles

Originally from Boston, she was raised in Florida and eventually ended up in Upstate New York at the age of 38. She's the first of her family – siblings, parents and children included – to go to college, said Laura Knochen-Davis, Technical Career Coach of the Perkins Career & Technical Education Program at SUNY Broome.

Carrasquillo, who is hearing-impaired, worked low-income jobs through the years: housekeeper, cashier, “everything you can think of,” she said. After a car accident damaged her lower back, however, she was unable to do such highly physical work.

“A lot of these low-income jobs require you to do lifting and I can't do that,” she said. “The only way to get a better job is to get more education.”

At home, she pondered her future and thought about her parents. Her mother had thought up a custom-made piñata business – but never shared her piñata-making secrets with her daughter. Veronica set to work, learning how to make the papier-mâché creations on her own.

She's now been making and selling piñatas for more than two years, including at such events as Binghamton's Jazz Festival and Duck Derby.

To improve her job prospects, she completed certifications at the [ATTAIN lab](#) in Binghamton, where she learned about SUNY Broome from a classmate. She had believed college was only for younger people and recent high school graduates, and was surprised to find out that her older classmate was a student.

In fact, older students aren't uncommon, noted Bill Ritter, a local small-business mentor and consultant who gave Carrasquillo feedback on her presentation. Statistics show that more than 35 percent of SUNY Broome students are over the age of 21.

“It all started because she had an entrepreneurial idea,” Knochen-Davis said. “You have never met anyone who worked harder.”

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