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Marcelina Vélez de Santiago: a lifetime of educational excellence

By ALBA FIGUEROA

By being president of one the 22 Pontifical Catholic Universities (PUCPR) around the world, Marcelina Vélez de Santiago has proved that dedication is the key to success. Vélez de Santiago said that hard work, good interpersonal communications and being fully committed to her career is what led her to where she is today.

Becoming president of the university was a steady and progressive journey for Vélez de Santiago. She says her college professors and the way they accomplished their responsibilities influenced her to become an educator.

Fresh out of college in 1965 with a master's degree in chemistry, Vélez de Santiago started her career as a chemistry professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico in Ponce. After that she said that both her field of work and career have evolved "positively and day by day."

Throughout the past four decades at the university Vélez de Santiago has enjoyed the challenge of preparing students to achieve their academic and personal goals. "One must have the thirst for knowledge," she says, "to be able to participate actively in the process of preparing them to become successful professionals."

Vélez de Santiago said other women will keep making breakthroughs and great contributions to Puerto Rico's educational system. She says women need "to work hard, have the desire to help others, always give their best and put all their love and feelings into the process of education."

During the past years, Vélez de Santiago has been published in scientific magazines and has also received many awards and recognitions for her role as an educator. And due to her proven track record, she was elected president of the university for another four years in February 2005. Highly dedicated, Vélez de Santiago says that on her time off she spends time thinking of strategies to improve the processes and success of the institution. As a result, the PUCPR has recently inaugurated a digital music and animation laboratory, remodeled the language laboratory and is currently remodeling the Law School of the institution.

Vélez de Santiago was born in San Germán, educated in Mayagüez and Río Piedras and is dedicated to her profession and family in Ponce. She has been married to Pedro Alberto Santiago, an attorney and chemical engineer, for 45 years and has five children.