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Hometown Hero: Mariela Schulten

Advocate volunteers to meet needs of Hispanic community

BY JANET C. WETZEL | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

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MONFORT HEIGHTS - It's a rare day when Mariela Schulten's phone doesn't ring nearly off the hook with calls from local Hispanics needing help with housing or school issues, transportation to doctors and more. It's so rare that when the phone isn't ringing, she often calls families she's helped to see if they're OK.

Schulten, 39, came here from Panama in 1989 to attend college. Over the years she saw many Hispanic families come to the U.S. and struggle to survive, cloaked in fear because they're unfamiliar with the language, the culture and the laws, and Schulten opened her heart, becoming a staunch advocate. She now works hours daily helping area Hispanics with various needs.

Schulten, a College of Mount St. Joseph part-time Spanish instructor, has volunteered at The Women's Connection since 2003, when she was the only one there who spoke Spanish. She helped start the Outreach Program for Hispanic Women and is its coordinator. She's helping start English as a Second Language and literacy programs at TWC, a Price Hill neighborhood center which has education and enrichment programs plus referral services for women and children.



THE ENQUIRER/CARRIE COCHRAN

Mariela Schulten of Monfort Heights volunteers at The Women's Connection and is a staunch advocate for Hispanics in the community.

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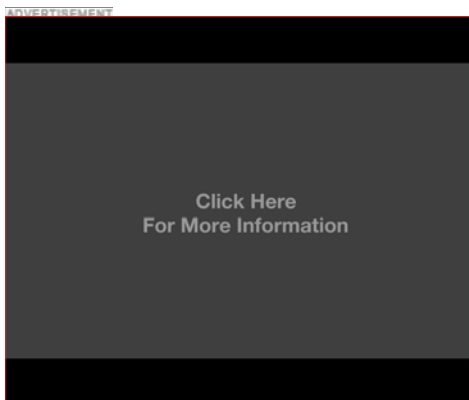
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"It was difficult to get the outreach program started because of trust issues," said Schulten, who lives in Monfort Heights with her children, Daniela and Gabriel. "We started out with only two women. Now we have 10 to 20 at a time. Some bring in relatives and we end up helping them all. I give my phone number out at TWC and in the community, and I get calls all the time with needs from housing issues to interpreting at court or schools."

One day she's coordinating free surgery for a man or helping a desperate mother find work. Another, she's looking for home furnishings for a family. Her efforts earned her an award this month from Leading Women Inc., said

Jenny Brady, development director of TWC, which nominated Schulten.

"Mariela is so passionate and committed to the outreach with the Hispanic community," Brady said. "It's not just a commitment for an hour or two a week. She lives it daily. She's a strong advocate for women and children we serve here and in the community."

Schulten's helping reaches across borders. In 2005 she went to Guatemala on a mission with her church, St. Ignatius, Monfort Heights. In 2001 she went on a mission to Honduras with the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and to Mexico with Sisters of Charity, where she's been an associate for five years. She's a member of the Panamanian Association and of Su Casa, Catholic Social Services, where she helps with fundraisers and health fairs.

She volunteered for years helping Hispanics at Cincinnati Public Schools and was hired part time for the job last year. But her work doesn't end at school. She helps students' families with needs from furniture and clothing to prenatal care.

"It's hard to see so many needs and only a few to help, so I try to do everything I can," Schulten said. "I want to teach my kids that volunteering, helping others is just something we're supposed to do." For more information, visit www.thewomensconnection.org or call 513-471-4673.

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