Freedom Award

Each year, The John Marshall Law School Alumni Association presents its Freedom Award to an honoree (in this year’s case, honorees) who embodies the highest aspirations of the John Marshall community, through their work, high ethical standards, efforts to help mankind, and initiatives to improve society and our nation. The 2015 honorees, Neli Vazquez Rowland and Brian Rowland (MS ’07), Founders of A Safe Haven, exemplify these ideals on a daily basis.

The Alumni Association also recognizes outstanding achievement in a career field or personal endeavor through its Distinguished Service Award. Recipients are honored for significant achievement in their chosen career, as well as sharing their time and talents at the law school; supporting John Marshall students, alumni, faculty, and staff; and reflecting the values that are a part of the law school’s tradition, heritage, and mission. This year’s Distinguished Service Award recipients—Hon. Dominick I. Archambault (’88), George Canellas (’96), Michael P. Cogan (’81), Hon. Thomas W. Murphy (’79), and Professor Mary T. Nagel (’88)—have gone above and beyond in these areas.

Awards will be presented at the 2015 Freedom Award & Distinguished Service Awards Luncheon on Friday, May 29. Tickets are $95, and donations benefit the Alumni Association Scholarship Fund. Reservations are being accepted at events.jmls.edu.

Freedom Award Recipients

Neli Vazquez Rowland and Brian Rowland Co-Founders, A Safe Haven

Neli Vazquez Rowland and Brian Rowland (MS ’07) are the Co-Founders of A Safe Haven (ASH), a network of not-for-profit and for-profit social enterprises that helps people—including youth, women with children, families, and veterans—transition from homelessness to self-sufficiency with pride and purpose. Since its founding in 1994, ASH has impacted the lives of more than 70,500 people, helping them to break the cycle of poverty and achieve financial independence.

With an annual budget of $20 million, ASH renews communities by investing in distressed and abandoned properties in high-risk neighborhoods to create safe and supportive environments for residents to rebuild their lives. ASH programming provides phased housing, meals, education, drug and alcohol treatment, health care, job training and placement, and access to permanent affordable & senior housing.

Neli is a first-generation American who grew up in Chicago’s Little Village community. She is a graduate of Loyola University’s School of Business and the Minority Executive Management program at Dartmouth’s Tuck School of Business. She built a solid 13-year career as an investment banker and rose to the level of vice president at leading investment banking firms.

Brian is also a first-generation American. He is a U.S. Army veteran with a BBA in finance from Loyola University and an MS in real estate law from John Marshall. Brian also worked as a finance professional.

Today, Neli is President of A Safe Haven Foundation, and Brian is the CEO of A Safe Haven LLC, which manages the foundation’s operations. Neli and Brian have received widespread praise for their work at A Safe Haven, from the White House—which gave ASH a “Champion of Change Award” in 2015—to their hometown, from Chicago Magazine, which named Neli Chicagoan of the Year in 2010. The couple serve on several boards and were named as Co-Chairs in 2014 to two transition policy committees for incoming Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner. They are lifelong Chicagoans and proud parents of their sons Dylan and Devin.