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Physician named one of 10 most influential Hispanic Canadians

By Mary Somers

One of Canada's leading neurosurgeons has been named among the 10 most influential Hispanic Canadians and he's delighted.

Ivar Mendez hopes it will inspire others from Latin America to come to Canada and Nova Scotia and build a future here.



Dr. Mendez, Dalhousie Medical School professor, head of the QEII Health Sciences Centre Division of Neurosurgery, director of the Neural Transplantation Laboratory and chair of the Brian Repair Centre, recently received the award, sponsored by Scotiabank. It recognizes the importance of supporting the Latin American community, one of the fastest growing cultural groups in Canada.



"There are about a million Hispanic Canadians now," says Dr. Mendez. "One of the keys for the community is to showcase role models for the future – individuals who will provide inspiration, especially for young people.

"The significance for me, personally, is that it demonstrates that there is a fertile environment in Nova Scotia. People can come here and thrive."

; Dr. Mendez came to Canada from Bolivia as a teenager. He is a world leader in the use of robotics in neurosurgery and has broken new ground in the field of neural transplantation – transplanting cells into the human brain. His work in treating Parkinson's Disease and other neurological conditions has put him at the forefront of modern neurosurgery. Dr. Mendez does extensive humanitarian work in Bolivia and other countries, and is building a neurosurgical unit in Rwanda. He is also a talented photographer and sculptor.

The list of honours he has received includes the Royal College Medal Award for Surgery from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada and the Dr. John Savage Memorial Award in International Health.

And he believes this latest award says a great deal about Nova Scotia and Atlantic Canada.

“It demonstrates that our hospitals, our universities and our overall environment has been a very good one in which to build a vision,” he says.

He cites the Brain Repair Centre – a multidisciplinary collaboration that specializes in groundbreaking treatments and technologies in the field of brain repair – and his work with robotics - as putting Atlantic Canada in the forefront of world medicine. “There’s a perception that we are a backwater and a ‘have not’ province, but we have a long and strong tradition of innovation from the time of ship building,” says Dr. Mendez.

“We are world leaders in robotics and telemedicine and in cell transplantation. We can demonstrate to potential immigrants that they can build a future here.”

The award to the 10 most influential Hispanic Canadians was presented in Toronto in the late fall. Prime Minister Stephen Harper will honor the 10 winners in Ottawa this spring.

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