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Article

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Dalhousie Physician meets Prime Minister

By Charmaine Gaudet

It isn't everyday you get a chance to shake hands with the Prime Minister of Canada. But May 27 was a banner day for Halifax neurosurgeon Dr. Ivar Mendez who was among this year's Scotiabank 10 most influential Hispanic Canadians attending a special reception in Ottawa hosted by Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

"It was an honour and a thrill for me to be given this award, but the opportunity to meet the Prime Minister really made the day very special and one I will always remember," said Dr. Mendez.

Award winners are chosen by a panel of judges that includes past winners, executives, and journalists from the Globe & Mail, Toronto Star, Canadian Business, CBC, FOCAL, Canadian Hispanic Congress and Hispanic Press Association of Canada. The awards program, now is in its third year, recognizes the importance of supporting the Latin American community which is one of the fastest growing cultural groups in Canada.



Prime Minister Stephen Harper (l) with Dr. Ivar Mendez

Dr. Mendez is Chair of the Brain Repair Centre, Director of the Neural Transplantation Laboratory at Dalhousie, and Head of the Division of Neurosurgery at Dalhousie and Capital Health. He was nominated for the award by the Bolivian Embassy in Canada for his clinical research and humanitarian contributions.

As a clinician, Dr. Mendez is pioneering the use of robotics in neurosurgery. As a researcher, he is breaking new ground in the area of neurotransplantation. At Canada's only cell restoration laboratory, Dr. Mendez' work is advancing the possibility of brain repair. He co-founded the Brain Repair Centre, where he developed a world-class collaboration of researchers and physicians aiming to find innovative solutions to diseases and injuries of the brain and spinal cord. He has played a critical role in expanding state-of-the-art research facilities and new neurobiology and stem cell laboratories in Canada. He is also a dedicated humanitarian, who has worked tirelessly to establish a number of programs in his native Bolivia targeting indigenous people, including school breakfast programs which feed more than 5000 children a day and dental clinics which now serve several thousand individuals each month.

"Dr. Mendez is a superb clinician and pioneering researcher with a deep sense of responsibility and service. He is making significant contributions on many levels, and this latest honour recognizes his talent, commitment, and innovation," said Dalhousie's Dean of Medicine, Dr. Tom Marrie, who added his hearty congratulations. "I can't think of anyone more deserving."

Dr. Mendez noted that the only thing that trumped his meeting with the Prime Minister was seeing two

very special graduates at Dalhousie Convocation ceremonies the next day: his son, Adrian, who graduated from the MD program, and his PhD science student Karim Mukhida, who was the sole recipient of a PhD in science at the ceremony. "It's been an unforgettable week!"