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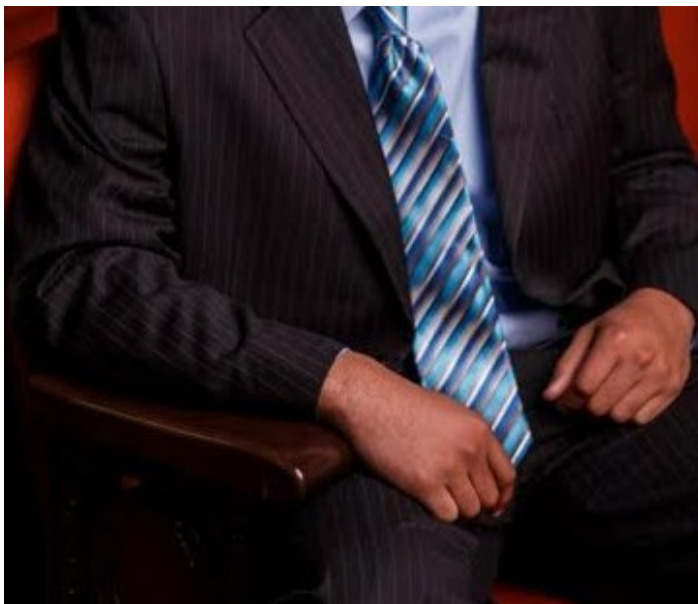


Jonathan Ferrer organized summit for 750 young people

By Paula Katinas
Brooklyn Daily Eagle

Jonathan Ferrer is an environmental hero and he has a national award to prove it! Ferrer, an 18-year-old Sunset Park resident who attends Rutgers University, has been named a winner of the 2014 Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes.

The Barron Prize celebrates the accomplishments of 25



Jonathan Ferrer won a national award for his work on climate change and environmental issues. Photo courtesy the Gloria Barron Prize

public-spirited young people from across the country who have made a positive difference to the planet through environmental works.

The top 15 winners receive a \$5,000 cash award to support their service work. The winners can also use the money to help pay their higher education costs.

Ferrer won the Barron Prize for his work advocating for environmental and climate justice in Sunset Park, community that is home to a large number of low-income residents. The community is sandwiched between three power plants, a sludge transfer facility, dozens of former industrial sites and the Gowanus Expressway, an interstate highway that sees 200,000 vehicles pass through each day.

Breathing in the fumes from those cars on the Gowanus and breathing in particles from other facilities can't be healthy over the long term, according to a 2013 article by the Academy of Medical and Public Health Services, which has information on its website indicating that Sunset Park

has a high rate of people hospitalized for respiratory and cardiovascular conditions due to particulate matter exposure.

Sunset Park also has one of the top five lung cancer rates in Brooklyn, according to a 2010 study by SUNY Downstate.

Among Ferrer's activities: organizing the annual New York City Climate Justice Youth Summit, a gathering of 750 young people brought together by UPROSE, a grassroots environmental justice group based in Sunset Park.

"It's so important that young people have a voice in shaping their communities. And we must use our voice to fight for the fair distribution of environmental burdens and amenities," Ferrer said.

Ferrer started his work at UPROSE four years ago as a summer intern when he was a student at Tottenville High School on Staten Island. He said that at the time, he had no idea of the environmental burdens faced by Sunset Park residents. But he learned fast. He rallied his peers to action, mapping the neighborhood to inform the city where trees were most needed and convincing city officials to expand the median on Third Avenue, a six-lane street that residents cross daily.

Ferrer also mobilized young people to help with a 2010 voter referendum to amend the New York City Charter to reduce the number of environmental burdens in New York City's low-income communities. He testified in front of the Environmental Protection Agency to warn that climate-change related storm surges along Sunset Park's industrial waterfront could unleash

toxic waste into the water and air. Eighteen months later after his testimony, Hurricane Sandy hit.

Ferrer now facilitates meetings for the Sunset Park Climate Justice and Community Resiliency Center, a group launched shortly after Hurricane Sandy to educate residents about affordable climate adaptation projects they can implement such as painting roofs white and planting more trees

He also took part in the massive climate change march that took place in Manhattan on Sept.21. More than 300,000 people marched.

The Barron Prize was founded in 2001 by author T.A. Barron and was named for his mother, Gloria Barron.

“Nothing is more inspiring than stories about heroic people who have truly made a difference to the world,” Barron said. “And we need our heroes today more than ever. Not celebrities, but heroes – people whose character can inspire us all. That is the purpose of the Gloria Barron Prize: to shine the spotlight on these amazing young people so that their stories will inspire others.”

September 25, 2014 - 11:38am

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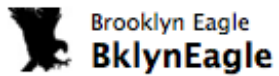


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