



# NISSAN

## ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

At Nissan there is much to celebrate this year. The automaker unveiled the fresh new look of its most popular sedan among Latinos, the 2016 Nissan Altima, in time for Hispanic Heritage Month. In October, the all-new 2016 Nissan TITAN XD was named “2015 Truck of Texas” by the Texas Auto Writers Association, and the company also received accolades for its focus on diversity and inclusion in both the workplace and in the community.

This year also afforded many opportunities for Nissan to applaud the successes of community partners it has long supported through its Nissan Neighbors community relations program. The Nissan Foundation awarded grants totaling \$730,000 to nonprofits that promote the value of cultural diversity in American society.

“Nissan prides itself on our continued commitment to reaching and engaging with the Hispanic community, whether it be through philanthropic partnerships with organizations like the National Council of La Raza and League of United Latin American Citizens or events such as the Latin GRAMMY Awards,” said Fred Diaz, division vice president and general manager, North America trucks and LCVs, Nissan North America, Inc.

Diversity at Nissan is reflected in the company’s leadership and workforce, its dealer and supplier network, and in the wide range of corporate outreach programs that lead to strong community connections. Valuing diversity makes business sense to Nissan, which has the most diverse consumer base of any automaker: 38 percent of Nissan’s U.S. customers are ethnically diverse.

“With the most diverse consumer base of any automaker, we understand the importance of engaging employees and consumers in an authentic way,” said Jeffrey Webster, Nissan’s director of Diversity and Inclusion. “That’s why we take a well-rounded approach to diversity, working cross-functionally and involving both employees and community partners.”

For its leadership in diversity and inclusion, Nissan received a perfect score on the Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index for the third consecutive year. DiversityInc Magazine also named the company to its 2015 Top 25 Noteworthy Companies list for the second year in a row.

Equally, Nissan honors the achievements of two community partners for their strong leadership and demonstrated commitment to diversity: Renata Soto, leader of Nashville’s Conexión Americas, was named board chair of National Council of La Raza (NCLR), and Hector Perez, southern regional director for the Association for Latino Professionals for America (ALPFA), was named Most Promising Business Professional by the organization.



Casa Azafrán, a project of Conexión Americas, serves as the gateway to Nashville’s international district

### BUILDING BRIDGES

When Nissan North America relocated its national headquarters from Los Angeles to Franklin, Tennessee, in 2006, it looked for local community organizations and found Conexión América, a local affiliate of the automaker’s partner National Council of La Raza.

“Nissan is our top corporate sponsor and they’ve been there all along the way,” shares Renata Soto, the group’s co-founder. Between 1990 and 2000, Nashville saw its Latino population grow by 446 percent. Soto, a native of Costa Rica, moved to the state with her husband in the early 1990s. Along with colleagues María Clara Mejía and José González, she started Conexión in 2002 to help Latino immigrants better adapt to life in their new country. To do this, they focused on three areas that they felt were integral to adjusting to life in Tennessee—social, economic, and civic integration. Later, programs like classes to learn English, purchasing a new home, and business development and growth were developed.

“The future of Nashville is linked to the success of Latino families,” asserts Soto, who currently serves as Conexión’s executive director. “In 2040, Latinos will make up 34 percent of Nashville’s population. We’re facilitating the economic integration that’s taking place in our community, like opening a business or buying a house that changes the trajectory of a family. We’re not only helping with the direct needs a family might have, but as a goal, we want to make sure resources are in place where they’re building assets for their families in Nashville neighborhoods.”

### LEADING THE WAY



Renata Soto

**“When you have long-term support, it increases your capacity to try new things.”**

Today, Conexión serves more than 2,500 families in Nashville and the surrounding area and has expanded to address immigration, taxes, and youth development. According to Soto, the continued support of partners like Nissan is essential for a nonprofit, not only to survive but also to grow. “Partners like Nissan, who are there year after year in a flexible way, allow us to be inventive and long-term thinkers, so that we’re not being measured by what happens in just one semester.”

Possibly the multifaceted organization’s most ambitious project to date has been the construction of Casa Azafrán. The 28,800-square-foot building creates a place where all members of the community can come together and celebrate their unique cultures.

“We wanted to make sure it



2016 Nissan Titan is Texas Truck of the Year

would be international, since families in Nashville come from all parts of the world,” explains Soto. “The name draws attention to the Arabic heritage in Latin America, since many words come from that language.”

Soto has also expanded her own reach, recently embarking on a three-year term as Chair of the DC-based National Council of La Raza, the largest national Latino advocacy group. She helped establish the first NCLR affiliate in Tennessee and feels that including groups like Conexión has created a voice for immigrants within the NCLR. Her staff at Conexión has also benefited from working with a national organization, inspiring them with greater expectations.

“One of the challenges we have in our community is that we’re so targeted and attacked and at the same time, ignored,” she says. “This is the challenge NCLR is tackling head to head, having a voice in Washington, D.C., and getting Latinos to vote, or become citizens so that they can vote.” Soto herself proudly became a U.S. citizen in 2007.

## NISSAN’S FOCUS ON EDUCATION

Nissan works with community organizations like Conexión to truly engage with Latinos in the U.S., with a special focus on education initiatives. Nissan actively partners with organizations such as LULAC’s National Educational Services Centers (LNESEC) to encourage Latino students to pursue STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) careers, and in 2015 donated more than \$95,000 to LNESEC to fund their STEM programs.

In November, Nissan hosted a four-day design competition at the national conference of the Society for Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE) where students addressed challenges in the design of autonomous vehicles.

Nissan’s commitment to the community also extends to its encouragement of its employees to volunteer their time and expertise. An employee since 1991, Lupe Jaramillo is the manager for Alternative Workforce Solutions Strategic Workforce Planning-Human Resources, and she serves on the board of directors for Conexión Americas.

“With Conexión Americas, I was most impressed with what they’ve done for the Latino and refugee community, particularly the effort to



Winners of 2015 SHPE Nissan Design Challenge

educate parents, especially those who are non U.S. citizens and have children who are the first generation born here,” says Jaramillo.

She also appreciates efforts to educate small business owners on basic information like filing taxes: “There’s a real lack of awareness about how much Latino businesses contribute taxes to our country.”

Jaramillo helps Conexión Americas leverage its mission with state and local governments to spread the message of the role immigrants play in the economy. “If we would optimize the immigrant population in this country, we would be much richer. Conexión has done a great job embracing and showing how rich it has made the culture here in Tennessee,” she adds.

Lupe’s work in human resources, and her constant challenge to attract an exceptional and diverse workforce at Nissan, have given her an even greater appreciation for the work of groups like Conexión. “I know how important it is for children to get a solid education and go on to higher education,” she asserts. “If we want this country to be competitive, we will need that talent in the future for our workforce.”

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

Another long-standing partner of Nissan is the Association of Latino Professionals for America (ALPFA). The oldest of all Latino professional organizations, ALPFA was founded in 1972 in Los Angeles as an association for those in accounting and finance but has since broadened its focus to provide professional development for Latino managers and students, as well as employment and business opportunities with Corporate America. Now ALPFA has a membership of 72,000 Latinos in 43 professional chapters and 150 student chapters nationwide.

According to Hector Perez, president of the ALPFA chapter in Orlando and southern regional director for the national organization, the partnership with Nissan began by connecting with the Latino community in Orlando.

“We created a council or group of Hispanic organizations that met with different [Nissan] dealerships to present them with opportunities for outreach,” he says. “The end result was that owners and general managers began receiving awards as community champions. Nobody was aware of the dealerships or their financial contributions that were now targeted to Latinos. Since then, there’s been a domino effect. Once Latino clients realize that Nissan is supporting groups like ALPFA and programs like the Women of ALPFA, it sends a message: ‘We invest in your community so you should invest in our products and services.’”

Recently, the Orlando chapter recognized Aaron Hill, General Manager of the Reed Nissan Clermont dealership, for leadership and community engagement. Hill and his team are working to make Hispanic consumers feel more comfortable about the shopping and purchase process. Building those relationships outside of the dealership goes a long way toward bringing those consumers into the Nissan family.

## GROWING LATINO LEADERS



Citing US Census projections for Latino community growth, Perez notes that groups like ALPFA are essential for grooming Latino leaders now, to guide the population to greater success in the future. “We need to have trained leaders in place, in academia, politics, and Corporate America, to impact the perception we have as a community,” he says.

In 2013, Nissan recognized the need to expand ALPFA’s leadership development to the Middle Tennessee area and became the founding sponsor of ALPFA’s Nashville chapter. During the start-up process, Hector Perez served as a mentor to the fledgling chapter and its new board of directors. Carlos Servin, Vice President of Finance for Nissan North America, Inc., serves on the corporate advisory board for the chapter.

“ALPFA has made a big impression on me,” Servin notes. “The covenant of success that exists among ALPFA leaders, members, students, corporate partners and the communities they serve is very strong and will certainly leave a long legacy in cities across the United States now and in years to come.”



**“What I like about ALPFA is that we’re here to help and to show Latinos what they can accomplish.”**

ALPFA also creates opportunities for Nissan employees who are just beginning their careers. Alejandro Angel, a system infrastructure engineer at Nissan, chose to join the ALPFA team after recently graduating from Middle Tennessee State University, where he served as president of a Latino student organization. He now serves as the executive vice president of ALPFA Nashville.

According to Angel, giving back to his community helps fill a void for many Latinos. “Growing up, there was a lack of organizations for Latinos in general that I could go to ask questions or get advice,” he shares. “What I like about ALPFA is that we’re here to help and to show Latinos what they can accomplish.”

Angel admits that he speaks from experience because that’s what the organization has done for him: “Attending ALPFA’s national convention in New York this year was an *Aha!* moment for me. I heard CIOs and CTOs tell their stories. Everything they said I could relate to—they grew up the same as I did, had the same background, it put things in perspective. I can keep going because there’s always more to learn.”

Nissan proudly engages with the Hispanic community through longstanding philanthropic partnerships with groups like Conexión Américas and ALPFA, working to improve the quality of life for everyone.

Valerie Menard

## ENSEÑA AWARDS

In 2016, Nissan and LATINO Magazine will present the ENSEÑA Awards to celebrate the accomplishments of Latino teachers around the country. Outstanding high school teachers in a STEM-related field who have truly given of themselves to their students will be selected from readers’ nominations and featured in LATINO Magazine. They’ll be invited to join Nissan executives, Latino community leaders, elected officials and others at an awards luncheon in Houston, Texas in February 2016. For more information, please visit [Latinomagazine.com](http://Latinomagazine.com).

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