

# Attorney claims top Fiestas Patrias award

By LORI RODRIGUEZ  
Houston Chronicle

Someday 9-year-old Maria Hernandez wants to teach other children about computers and, last week, as she and classmate Susanna Gonzales, 10, were honored for designing a computer program that teaches English to Spanish-speaking students, both seemed destined to succeed.



Torres

Already considered a success is attorney Isaias D. Torres, 35, who successfully argued before the Supreme Court that undocumented children have the right to attend public schools in Texas.

Torres received the Fiestas Patrias organization's annual Distinguished Mexican-American Award Thursday.

A Distinguished Mexican-American Student Award was presented by Houston school Superintendent Joan Raymond to both Maria and Susanna, fourth- and fifth-graders, respectively, at Tijerina Elementary School in the heavily Hispanic East End.

"I like helping people," said Maria, after receiving her award at a luncheon sponsored by Southwestern Bell Telephone Co.

"I especially like it when my classmates tell me they like the

signs or the colors or the Spanish and English translations. It makes me feel like I've really done something for someone."

Maria and Susanna had never worked with computers until they confronted the Apple machines in their classrooms last year.

Almost immediately, they teamed to write three lessons on colors, weather and the outdoors that introduced English and Spanish vocabulary and were illustrated by low-resolution graphics they drew.

Maria and Susanna have Apple IIs at their homes now, first prizes in the recent Apple Computer Clubs International merit competition.

Torres also won his award for helping others.

In 1978, he began the legal battle that in 1981 won the children of illegal aliens the right to attend U.S. public schools.

Torres, a native of New Braunfels, also represented Hispanic prisons in a 1983 lawsuit against Comal County that resulted in construction of a much more livable facility there.

This year, he is representing Hispanic workers fired by the Pasadena school district, allegedly because of the new immigration bill.

Torres has been conducting free seminars in Spanish so local illegals are aware of their rights under the new law.

"That's what the law ought to be about," he said.

"It's a service, and it's important for all lawyers to remember that."

Fiestas Patrias, noting Mexico's independence from Spain, will be celebrated this week.