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HELPING FAMILIES GROW 

*Julie Kotz Richie calendar editor for Dallas Family and mother of two children.*

## Parenting People: Elvia Wallace-Martinez a Success Story

### Entrepreneur Helps Immigrants Believe in Themselves

Growing up in Acapulco may sound like a dream to many Americans who envision days spent lounging on white sand and swimming in warm water. But the reality is quite different for most Mexicans who live there, according to Elvia Wallace-Martinez, who grew up in Acapulco, leaving only after a failed marriage. In 1977, with the peso devalued, the newly single Wallace-Martinez needed to support herself and mother. She knew the only way to do it was to go to the United States and achieve the American dream.

Fortunately, getting a good job proved to be easy for the trilingual Wallace-Martinez (she speaks French in addition to English and Spanish). With a career in Business Administration and Marketing from her country of origin, she worked for American Airlines for five years and then began a sales career, all while taking English and business courses at North Lake College. She eventually started her own successful Hispanic advertising and talent agency. But the long hours took their toll on her second husband and their young son. "I knew that I wasn't happy even though I had everything a woman could want. I decided to start a new life," she says.

An avid Dr. Laura Schlessinger fan, Wallace-Martinez began a similar local radio show as well as a newspaper column and produced television segments for Spanish-language media company Univision, all offering values and culture advice to the growing number of Metroplex Hispanic and Latino families. An Irving city council member suggested that she complete the necessary paperwork to create a nonprofit organization, which she did in 1998.

The organization she formed is Irving-based Debes Creer En Ti (DCET), the Spanish acronym for Believe in Yourself Inc. DCET strives to help Hispanic immigrants preserve their values and navigate their new social and political waters through five programs: Folkloric Arts Mentoring Amigos, which teaches youngsters native dancing; English as a Second Language; Valores Familiares parenting-skills workshops; Information and Referral; and Superate literacy programs. In 2000, DCET became affiliated with SER – Jobs for Progress National, an organization that helps economically disadvantaged people find permanent employment.

"I'm a proud immigrant," says Wallace-Martinez. "I understand that the process of assimilation and acculturation is very hard. People don't understand that (immigrants) come here at a survival level. You have to start first with immigrant parents and convince one parent to stay

home. But it's not easy right now because everyone is tempted by materialism."

One family Martinez has helped includes two well-educated parents – a doctor and an accountant – who faced numerous barriers upon arriving in the United States. She couldn't be a doctor anymore because she didn't know English and needed to show certifications from Mexico. Both are doing well now working as a nurse and CPA, thanks in part to DCET programs.

Today, Wallace-Martinez is an icon in the local Hispanic community. Through her organization, she hopes to inspire new immigrants to follow her example and achieve their own American dream. She gives them this advice: "Educate, educate yourself. Education will get you where you want to be. And don't let your children steal your authority."

For more information about the DCET/Believe in Yourself Inc., call 972-871-8285, 214-587-1983 or go to [www.dcenti.org](http://www.dcenti.org). dcenti1@sbcglobal.net

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