

Miami Dade College president talks about receiving Presidential Medal of Freedom

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Lynn Martinez

MIAMI (WSVN) - The president of Miami Dade College will rub elbows with entertainers, athletes and even the president when he receives the country's highest civilian honor next week.

Dr. Eduardo J. Padrón is one of 21 honorees who will receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom at the White House next week. The Miami Dade College president is being honored for his work as an educator over the past 40 years.

"I am still in disbelief," Padrón said. "For someone like me, who came to this country as an immigrant, as an adolescent with no knowledge of the culture, the language and no money, to be at a point in my life when the president of the greatest nation in the world is acknowledging my work, I'm touched."

Padrón's work has affected tens of thousands of students, transforming Miami Dade College into a mecca for higher education and inclusion. The school enrolls and graduates more minority students than any other institution in the United States.

"Talent is universal but opportunity is not," Padrón said, "and when you open the door of opportunity to people of all natures, some great things happen."

Padrón credited the honor to the success of the school.

"I see this as a real tribute to an institution that is nationally recognized because it has demonstrated something very important for the future of America," Padrón said, "and that is that access and excellence can go hand in hand."

Bill and Melinda Gates, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Oprah Winfrey and Ellen Degeneres are some of the other honorees.

"When I look at the list of people who have received this before, people like Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and so many big, big people, and the people who are getting it with me this time around, it's just hard to believe I am part of that," Padrón said.

The Miami Dade College president has also served six U.S. presidents in various roles.

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