

# BRONX PEOPLE

SPOTLIGHT ON PLINIO AYALA

## Ex-bizman gives teens the skills to succeed

BY SONDRA WOLFER

WALKING HOME FROM WORK in the Bronx when he was 16 years old, Plinio Ayala was caught in the crossfire of a gang shooting. It left him unharmed — but not unchanged.

"I said, 'I got to get out of here.' I knew I had to finish high school, go to college, go and come back and infuse some of what I learned into the community," said Ayala.

Today, the 42-year-old Ayala is accomplishing his goal as president of Per Scholas, a Bronx-based nonprofit that connects low-income kids and families across the five boroughs with affordable computers and technology training.

After college, he worked briefly as a manager for Macy's before moving to Puerto Rico to launch an air conditioning and refrigeration business. He sold the successful company to return to his home borough to help people develop work and

job-hunting skills. "What I really wanted to do was help some of these people who didn't make it like I did," he said.

Ayala has since worked for several prominent nonprofits, including Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Council and South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corp., moving from job placement and training positions to management.

"This is a community that wants opportunity and betterment for their children and families, and didn't have access to it," Ayala said. "We give them access to information and access to skills that would allow them to earn a livable wage."



### VITAL STATS

**BEST PART OF JOB:** "Knowing that every day we have changed lives."

**BIGGEST HEADACHE:** "Making sure that at the end of the day we have paid all our bills and made payroll."

**BIO BITS:** Born and raised in Tremont; attended public schools until being accepted by the Collegiate School in Manhattan; earned bachelor's degree in American studies from Wesleyan University in 1985; lives in Orange County, N.Y., with his wife, Lourdes, sons Jason and Alex and daughter, Alissa.

**FAVORITE FOODS:** Pastelitos, a savory Puerto Rican dish of plantains and meat wrapped in plantain leaves.

**FAVORITE PLACE IN THE BRONX:** "New York Botanical Garden."

**FAVORITE VACATION SPOT:** "Florida."  
**FAVORITE TEAM:** "I'm a huge Mets fan."

**FAVORITE LEISURE ACTIVITY:** Playing softball.

**SECRET TALENT:** "Keeping people calm under adverse circumstances."

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