

# Contest is music to his ears

**When JCCC student** Abel Ullón came to the United States from Paraguay in 2006, he spoke little English and worked as a trash collector. He used his first paycheck to buy a guitar and began singing on the streets in the Plaza to earn extra money. Eventually, he was invited to play Friday nights at Chelly's Café in Waldo.

The intervening years have been life-changing as Ullón's musical career has taken off with talent, persistence and English skills learned at JCCC.

Most recently, Ullón was selected to go to New York and sign a contract with Time Warner Cable, who will promote his music video on their stations in 2011. Ullón's video performance was chosen from 117 entries in the Alcanza La Fama national talent contest created in partnership with the National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts and Time Warner. The winner was selected by judges including Latino actors Jimmy Smits and Esai Morales, Latin Grammy's nominee music producer Gustavo Farias, and popular votes.

"When I found out I was the winner I went so crazy that I started to cry," Ullón said. "This is a big step for me to make my first musical video."

That award is the latest of Ullón's recognitions. He was also selected by State Farm Insurance, Kansas, to attend the Latin Grammy Awards in November 2010 in Las Vegas. And in September 2010, he fulfilled a childhood dream as he was cast to appear with Don Francisco, Miami, host of *Sábado Gigante (Giant Saturday)*, the longest-running TV variety show in the world.

Ullón learned to play the guitar from his mother. His parents are musicians, and Ullón started performing in the church where his father is pastor. He was playing in a church camp in Paraguay, when he met his future wife whose family is from Topeka.

"In my country, musical artists don't have a lot of opportunities," Ullón said.

Ullón, a member of JCCC's International Club, knew that to be successful in the U.S. he had to learn English. So he enrolled in JCCC's *English for Academic Purposes Reading/Vocabulary III* class.



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"Abel is a fine example of why teaching is such a wonderful career. His great personality has inspired his classmates and me," said Betty Teenor, adjunct professor, Reading/EAP.

Ullón says Time Warner is encouraging him to keep up JCCC English classes so he can do interviews and meet with media in both Spanish and English. His goal is to be bilingual and to study guitar and business.

Life is "amazing" for Ullón right now. With 3-year-old daughter, Gabrielle, Ullón's wife, Lisa, works at a full-time job during the days, which allows Ullón to go to classes from 6-9 p.m. Monday-Thursday and play gigs Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

From January to April 2010, the couple returned to Paraguay so Gabrielle could meet Ullón's family. He had enough money to record a few songs in a studio. A music producer heard him, and enabled Ullón to produce an entire CD, *You*, with five songs in English and six in Spanish. Now artists in Mexico and the Phillipines are asking permission to perform his music. He says the songs with the most downloads are *My Dad* (a song he wrote about his dad when he was missing him on Father's Day) and *Mi Megor Canción (For My Daughter)*.

"I am following my dream," said Ullón, who turned 28 on Feb. 19, 2011. "I am a person, who if I say I will do something, I do it."

Visit <http://www.abel-Ullón.com> to see and hear Ullón perform. **Im**