



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANNA MULE

Jose Ocasio demonstrates his Puerto Rican identity through rhythm at the Wagner College event.

Immigrant group bestows honors

By **STEPHANIE SLEPIAN**
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

Despite damage to his own home, Ilya Geller jumped into the role of volunteer after Hurricane Sandy, mostly as a translator for Russian immigrants whose beachfront homes were de-

stroyed.

At the same time, the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation gave food, clothing and building supplies to many immigrant families.

Both Geller and the Siller Foundation received accolades on Wednesday at the Staten Island Immigrants Council Award Ceremony at Wagner College.

The honorees were recognized by representatives of the Russian, Latino, Albanian, African, Polish and Arabic communities.

"In an atmosphere not always welcoming to new immigrants, Frank Siller has been the outstanding example of gracious hospitality," said the Rev. Gonzalo Mercado, director of the Immigrants Council.

Geller, a 21-year-old student at the College of Staten Island, has spent almost every day volunteering at one relief organization or another — the Occupy Free Sandy Store at St. Margaret Mary's R.C. Church, the Staten Island Unit Team Center on Midland Avenue and the FEMA Disaster Recovery Center.

In addition to the awards ceremony, the evening featured a panel discussion, "Hispanic Staten Island: Culture and Identity."

Traditional music was performed by Jose and Lydia Ocasio.

The ceremony was held in conjunction with an exhibit spotlighting Hispanic heritage and identity at Wagner. It runs through May 5.