

MEET KARINA MARTINEZ

A Latina Who Found Purpose and Community



Written By:
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Karina was born and raised in Monterrey, Mexico. She is a proud board member of Latinas Network and a part-time Resident Artist through the City of Roanoke's Artist in Residence Program. She has led numerous paint nights, participated in community art projects, and even served as the creative coordinator for the first *Día de los Muertos* celebration at the Taubman Museum, a collaboration between the museum and Latinas Network. Karina also showcases her vibrant artwork at Star MailHub and More, a local gift shop featuring her unique pieces.

But Karina's deep involvement in the community didn't happen overnight, it was the result of a quiet journey of self-discovery. When she first arrived in Roanoke, she introduced herself as a stay-at-home mom. Over time, however, she rediscovered her passion for painting and gradually transformed into a local artist and dedicated volunteer, using her creativity to give back and inspire others. This is her story of transformation.

From Curiosity to Connection: Karina's Journey of Purpose in a New City

In 2020, Karina's husband was offered a temporary job in Roanoke, Virginia. With plans to stay only 3 years, she and her family packed their bags and prepared for a short-term move abroad. However, shortly after arriving, the COVID-19 pandemic hit, making it difficult for them to fully experience everything Roanoke had to offer. It wasn't until 2021, once her child was fully enrolled in school and her husband had returned to work, that Karina began adjusting to life as a full-time stay-at-home mom.

At first, being new to the city, she enjoyed having time for herself and started to venture out by going to the gym, sightseeing, shopping, exploring Roanoke, and catching up on her favorite series after tending to her home and family. But that sense of novelty faded quickly. Karina soon realized that while those activities were enjoyable, she was missing something deeper—a sense of purpose, something meaningful that could help her feel fulfilled and accomplished. That's when she decided to begin her journey as a volunteer.

She first began volunteering with the Rescue Mission of Roanoke and the Local Colors of Western VA organization, where she found joy in giving back and connecting with others. Driven by a deep curiosity and a desire to become more involved in the community,



KARINA MARTINEZ

Karina began looking for other opportunities to engage, and that's when she came across the Latinas Network Instagram account. Through that account, she learned about the group's events and decided to attend, hoping to make new friends and discover what the Latinas Network was all about. She would later realize that what started as a simple curiosity quickly turned into a meaningful connection that would play a big role in her personal journey and creative reawakening.



Finding Her Voice: How Karina Turned Self-Doubt Into Creative Empowerment

After attending several Lunch with Leaders events, Karina couldn't help but feel like she didn't quite belong. Many of the Latinas she met were active community members, business owners, entrepreneurs, or professionals with impressive careers. Compared to them, she saw herself simply as "a housewife," and that left her feeling a bit intimidated. However, those feelings didn't stop her. Despite her doubts, Karina continued to show up and stay involved. During one of the sessions, Karina opened up and shared that, back in her home country, she had built a 20-year career in industrial engineering and had recently taken up painting as a new hobby. As Karina showed photos of her paintings to other Latinas from her phone, everyone was genuinely impressed by her talent. That's when Kat Pascal had the idea to ask if she would be interested in hosting a paint night for the group. That simple act of sharing marked the beginning of a new journey in her life.

Although Karina had never taught a painting class before—let alone in English—she couldn't help but question how she would pull it off. Still, despite the challenge and self-doubt, she was all in. Karina embraced the opportunity and committed wholeheartedly to leading her first paint night with the Latinas Network group. This is exactly what I had been looking for," Karina shared. "I wanted an opportunity to serve the community, and it was wonderful to be able to do that through something I'm truly passionate about—painting.

Karina remembers the very first time she led the class as an incredibly enriching experience. For her, it marked the beginning of truly feeling a sense of belonging in the Roanoke community. Before joining Latinas Network, she often felt like an outsider, someone just passing through, here only temporarily. But that paint night, along with the connections she made with other Latina women leading projects and businesses, shifted something within her. It not only empowered her but also inspired her to take her hobby to the next level. "This group gave me the push I needed to try something new," Karina said with a smile.



What she loves most about Latinas Network is that it offers a space for everyone, with activities that cater to a wide range of interests. For those who enjoy running, there's a running club; for book lovers, a book club; and for those passionate about giving back, a dedicated volunteer group. But what stands out to her the most is the welcoming, judgment-free environment. "It's a place that helps Latina women discover their passions and supports them as they grow—just like they did with me through art," Karina explained.

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After leading her first paint night, everything began to snowball—in the best way. Karina became increasingly involved with local art organizations, and one opportunity after another started opening up in a field she feels passionate about. She is now a member of the Arts Connect Neighbors team, a city-run program, and regularly helps organize the Daisy Art Parade, celebrated each May.



Her dedication and talent have not gone unnoticed. In 2024, Karina was also honored with the Choice Award for the Art Space at the Celebrating Roanoke's BIPOC Artists pop-up exhibition, which spotlighted the work of artists of color living and working in the Roanoke Valley.

From Temporary Stay to Permanent Home:

Remember how Karina and her family originally planned to stay in Roanoke for just three years? Well, though to her husband's job, they were offered the opportunity to

remain in the Star City as permanent residents, and they gladly accepted. Karina was especially happy with how well her son had adapted to the culture, appreciating the many outdoor activities and family-friendly programs Roanoke has to offer, like biking along the greenway and going fishing. For her, the outdoor lifestyle was also a major factor in the decision to stay. What was once meant to be a short-term stop has now become a place they proudly call home.

One thing you should know about Karina is that she's an outgoing, stylish woman who enjoys a good drink in the company of good friends. When Karina's in the mood for a quick road trip and a change of scenery, she and her family often head to Charlotte, North Carolina. The city offers a different vibe from Roanoke, with new restaurants and a variety of cuisines to explore, making it a fun and refreshing getaway.


Karina's Advice to Empower Other Latinas

Now that Karina is settling in Roanoke permanently, she looks forward to staying actively involved with Latinas Network and continuing to contribute in meaningful ways, especially in areas where her skills and experience can make a difference. "We all have a place in this group," she reflects. "The sun shines for all of us—it's just a matter of choosing to make a change or finally trying that one thing you've always dreamed of," Karina emphasizes.

Karina first picked up a paintbrush in 2018, making her relatively new to the art world. "I had no idea the potential I had in this field until I gave it a try—thanks to the encouragement of the women around me," she says. "The only real limitations are the ones we place on ourselves. I invite everyone to believe in their own abilities. If you believe you can make it happen, you will make it happen."

Don't forget to connect with her on social media!

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