



Karina Katalina Moreno at the Paris Olympics, summer 2024. Photo courtesy of Moreno.

Karina Katalina Moreno is living her dream

Based in San Diego, the quality control stability scientist embraces family, sports, work, and her leadership role in Illumina’s iLatinx employee resource group

KARINA KATALINA MORENO has taken a circuitous route to her American dream. She grew up in Monterrey, Mexico, about 140 miles (225 km) south of Laredo, Texas, and got her degree in biotech engineering at Tecnológico de Monterrey. Following a brief stop in Barcelona, Spain, she earned her master of science degree at the University of Edinburgh.

Family brought Moreno back to Monterrey. Her mother was diagnosed with lung cancer, and she moved in to help care for her parents and three siblings. She worked as a science teacher at a local high school and helped her mom get to and from treatment.

“After my mom passed away, I thought, okay, this is life, I knew it was coming,” she says. “She was diagnosed with stage three lung cancer, and the doctors told us she wouldn’t have a lot of time. She was a real fighter, and stayed with us for three more years. But 13 days after my mom died, my dad passed from COVID. At that point I felt lost. My life changed so much in two weeks that I didn’t know what I was going to do with my life.”

Coming to Illumina

Moreno had worked in pharma and cosmetics but always

wanted to pursue a career in biotech. In 2023, a friend encouraged her to apply at Illumina and, after a rigorous interview process, she was hired as a quality control stability scientist. In this role, she focuses on measuring reagent stability, which has already paid big dividends in extended expiration dates.

She’s been with Illumina for about a year and a half, but Moreno is already making her mark. She is well known in Building 6, at Illumina’s San Diego campus, for her seemingly endless supply of Mexican candy—it’s part of her ongoing mission to share her culture.

iLatinx

Moreno is the treasurer of iLatinx, a growing employee resource group (ERG) at Illumina. The group has more than a hundred active members and hosts many events that focus on building community: attending San Diego Padres and Wave games, celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month, and working with the Make-a-Wish Foundation and the Clarity Foundation.

The group has also committed to mentoring young women. For the past two summers, iLatinx has partnered with the Women at Illumina Network ERG to

sponsor Girls Who Lead¹ days at the company.

“We have around 60 girls who come to Illumina and go to the lab with us,” Moreno says, “but we try to involve them in other activities, as well, because not everyone works in the lab. Some people handle money or are in charge of production. We want to show them all their options.”

The iLatinx group has big plans for this year’s Hispanic Heritage Month, which runs from September 15 to October 15: a career panel, salsa classes, a mariachi band, and lots of treats. They highlight different countries each year: Last time it was Mexico and Peru; this year will be Colombia and Venezuela, among others.

“People like to learn about the different cultures at Illumina, and we try to find people from those places who can share their flags, food, and local customs,” Moreno says. “We want everyone to know they don’t have to be

Latino to be part of this community. They only need to like the food, music, and culture.”

Her safe space

An avid athlete, Moreno has been active in team handball² since she was young and now plays on teams in San Diego and Baja California. At Illumina, she participates in flag football, basketball, and softball. When she’s not working or playing, she often visits her family in Monterrey. But looking at the life she’s built, she is incredibly grateful to have found a home in San Diego and Illumina.

“Everybody is really open [at Illumina], and that makes me feel great,” says Moreno. “I have this accent and nobody cares, and I can wear a flower shirt, which is typical in Mexico, or sing in Spanish, and nobody is going to say anything. For me, it’s a really safe space.” ♦

1. [linkedin.com/company/girls-who-lead](https://www.linkedin.com/company/girls-who-lead)

2. youtu.be/zWh4tmKtluw