Editorial

Celebrating Our Heritage

Sometimes it's important to celebrate the good things life brings -such as our heritage. Hispanic Heritage month was designated by President Ronald Reagan for the period between September 15 and October 15. Every year, states, cities and neighborhoods join in celebrating the successes of Latinos and our contributions to America. Certainly a list of items awaits as we journey toward better standards of living and well-being, including equality, fair treatment, and better opportunities for our younger generations. However, we take pride in celebrating those achievements that make our culture unique and special.

What does Hispanic Heritage mean, after all? During Hispanic Heritage Month we recognize Latinos for helping shape our national character and strengthen our communities. I think we all agree that the vitality and liveliness of Hispanic cultures are a great gift to America and have been part of the fabric of our nation from its inception.

Latinos' valuable contributions to many fields have enriched our nation, and continue to do so. Hispanics have participated fully in our government, in business, science, sports, the arts, and have contributed greatly to the nation's armed forces with 65,000 members serving today.

At the national level Latinos have become the largest ethnic minority. In the District of Columbia, Hispanics represent the fastest growing group, and are now 10% of the total population.

Diversity within the Latino community is greatly misunderstood. Based on my own experience growing up in Mexico, I have numerous memories of celebrations such as the *Día de los Muertos*, *Día de los Reyes Magos*, food such as *chalupas y molotes* and a feeling of sharing a common culture. I have to be honest: don't recall anything about *Cinco de Mayo*. But the *relatos* told by my friends from El Salvador, Bolivia, Peru, Puerto Rico, Guatemala and Dominican Republic are just as diverse. As I have traveled across the United States, I have found the diversity among Latino cultures a fascinating and unending study.

The diversity we enjoy has been difficult to explain or capture with words even for Latinos. We are bound by two elements: language and geography. Conversely these are precisely the two things that some erroneously believe bring us into conflict by separating us into Latinos (a term that derives from our geographic origin) and Hispanics (a term deriving from our linguistic cohesion).

Hispanic Heritage is about the mix of cultures that we are. Collectively, such diversity enriches us and enriches everyone who wishes to learn about Latinos in this country. It enriches America every day. It makes life in this country not only more culturally diverse, but more culturally interesting and prosperous. Culture, after all, defines a society to itself and to other societies.

In closing, I ask you to take a moment learn more about Latinos - about the way we have contributed to Washington, DC, the way we live, the way we enjoy our traditions, the way we honor our myths and religion. The way we believe in family as the most important element of any culture. The way we want to keep working hard to make the District of Columbia and our country more productive, enjoyable and peaceful.

I hope you enjoyed Hispanic Heritage Month 2004. ¡¡¡Hasta muy pronto!!!

Ola's Vision for Language Access

Since the enactment of the District of Columbia's Language Access Act (LAA) last April, the Office on Latino Affairs (OLA) has had a clear vision of how access to city services should be provided to local Latino residents.

Latinos represent the largest share of Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals living and working in the District, and will be the largest group affected by how well DC government delivers on the promises of the new law. These promises include the translation of vital documents, the availability of oral language services, the hiring of bilingual public contact personnel, the training of DC employees in multicultural awareness, and the outreach efforts tailored to limited-English proficient members of our nation's capital. There is no doubt that a majority of the more than 50,000 Latinos of Washington, DC, will feel the far-reaching implications of such landmark legislation.

This is why OLA has continued to provide guidance to DC government agencies, to ensure that local government services are delivered in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner to the Spanish-speaking public and has facilitated linkages with community-based organizations.

From the outset, Mayor Williams has recognized that greater language access to governmental programs could improve the quality of life of Latino families, seniors, and children. Typically Latino residents, who lack English skills, face significant obstacles to receiving services. This may well decrease as the Language Access Act is implemented by increasing the District agencies' ability to deliver services to the non-English speaking public, which in turn should extend the effectiveness and reach of vital public programs.

Throughout this process, OLA's Advocacy and Language Access Program has provided technical support to DC government agencies covered by the law, by aiding them with the preparation of LAA Baseline Assessments and the initial drafting of Language Access Plans. OLA has proactively collaborated with the Office of Human Rights (OHR) and broadened its working relationship with the Office of Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OAPIA) to improve the level of coordination and sharing of knowledge among DC government offices charged with monitoring the implementation of the Act.

A product of this growing inter-office partnership has been the development of a joint reporting mechanism for use by the first 22 agencies or "covered entities" that must comply with the Language Access Act. OLA, OHR, and OAPIA also have recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding that delineates how each office will cooperate and consult on fundamental issues relevant to the effective implementation of the Act.

The next step is to draft regulations for the new law. The regulations will detail how the Act's provisions will be carried out in practical terms. OLA, OHR, and OAPIA are working with the community based Language Access Coalition and OHR to come up with regulations that will adequately serve and meet the expectations of the District's Latino residents.

From OLA's perspective, LAA is about providing our LEP residents with equal access to local government services. After all, the law stipulates that the term "access means to be informed of, participate in, and benefit from public services, programs, and activities offered by a covered entity at a level equal to English proficient individuals."

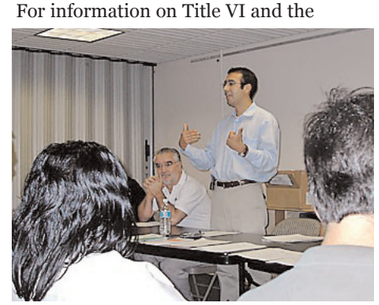
Advocacy

Milestones in the Implementation of the Language Access Act

The Language Access Act of 2004, which Mayor Williams enacted April 21, 2004, charges OLA with assisting District government agencies that conduct outreach to communities with limited English proficient populations with data collection and quality control of translated materials. Twenty-two DC government agencies are now complying with the Language Access Act by affording Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals equal access to any vital services and materials the agencies provide to the community at large. In order to facilitate the agencies' efforts, OLA serves as a consultative body to the new Language Access Director, Aryan Rodriguez, who is housed in the Office of Human Rights.

On Wednesday, August 4, OLA, OAPIA and OHR held a joint meeting to commemorate the merger of the Mayor's Language Access Initiative and the Language Access Act, which the former LEP coordinators under the Mayor's Initiative attended, thereby becoming the Language Access Coordinators for the Language Access Act.

On August 17, 2004, the three agencies were charged with implementing the Act, the Language Access Coordinators and their agency Directors participated in a training session organized by The Multicultural Community Service, funded by a grant from OLA. The all-day session featured presentations by several members of the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division and members of the District's Language Access Coalition. The morning session focused on an overview of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Federal LEP requirements. For information on Title VI and the federal government's efforts to afford meaningful access to services to LEP populations, see www.lep.gov, which is hosted by the U.S. Department of Justice. The afternoon sessions compared the Federal Guidance and D.C. Language Access Act, with presentations by leaders of the LEP community regarding outreach efforts in the District.



Collaboration continues with the Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, OHR, OLA, OAPIA and the D.C. Language Access Coalition. On September 21 the Department of Justice hosted a very successful and informative Limited English Proficiency Conference with participants from all over the United States. Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division of the United States Department of Justice, Alexander Acosta, opened and closed the conference with words of wisdom and inspiration, based on his experience as the son of Cuban immigrant parents who faced many of the same issues and obstacles our limited English proficient community experiences today.

For further resources and information, please go to OLA's website.

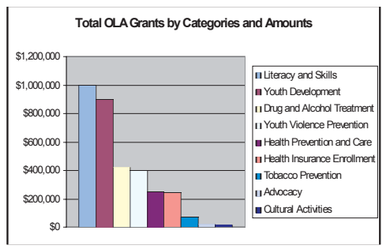
Grants

Grants Program Report

The ultimate goal of OLA's Grants Program is to ensure that, while community organizations continue building their capacity aimed at quality programs, they deliver the intended contractual goals and prove that outcomes are met for their clients. As a result of an improved administration of funding, and the excellent work of OLA's community partners, this program had a great effect in the Latino community this year. This effect is measured by increased efficiency in grants management, the satisfaction of grantees with the services provided by OLA, and improved community outcomes.

The investment during Fiscal Year 2004 totaled $3,553,700, an increase of 11.5% from 2003. It is estimated that over 4,000 unduplicated people were served through OLA's grants: OLA conducted two competitive award processes in FY 2004: one for $1 million in the strategic areas of education and family literacy, and a second for $425,000 to address the long-standing gap of substance abuse awareness and inpatient treatment services for Latino adults. Both activities led to funding for 21 community organizations, ranging from $32,000 to $350,000 individual awards. For the first time ever OLA provided support in the amount of $100,000 in the area of tobacco prevention and tobacco purchase compliance. Funding was provided by the Health Department and efforts were primarily youth-targeted.

OLA also approved funding in new areas of civic engagement and advocacy, Latino cultural activities, and a new $400,000 investment in gang prevention and intervention strategies to address the growing youth violence situation that escalated during the summer and fall of 2003. The Latino Gang Prevention and Intervention program benefited more than 250 youth across the community and funded a dozen organizations operating on different fronts, such as community schools, parks and recreation centers, CBOs and the Oak Hill juvenile detention facility. This new program complemented on-going activities funded by OLA under PRO-Urban Youth, an all-summer stream of funding in its third year of operations for youth employment and other engaging and productive activities.



OLA also continued providing continuation funding for its health-focused programs. This investment reached $800,000 this year in areas of awareness, insurance enrollment, prevention and education about chronic diseases, and health care operating support.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all OLA grantee organizations for their great work this year.

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Outreach

❖ Latino Family Fair

On Wednesday August 18, more than 30 government agencies, 60 CBOs and more than 800 people from the community participated in the fair. In addition, the department of health vaccinated children going back to school while the food bank was busily distributing fresh fruits, vegetables, milk and pasta to the community. Simultaneously, the Teatro de los Trabajadores presented their music and theatre; the entertainment group from El Alfarero Church impressed us with their young dancers and singers. Thanks to the government agencies, community based organizations, Lincoln Middle School, volunteers and the community for making the Latino Family Fair a great success.

❖ Healthy and Happy campaign

Last September 2, OLA and the DC Department of Health hosted the "Healthy and Happy" campaign destined to provide health services to school-age children of the District's Latino Community. This campaign included dental testing given by Mary's Center's Baby and Mom Bus. Also, DC Health Alliance offered registration for free medical insurance for the underserved population in the DC area.

❖ DC night out

On August 3rd, Mayor Anthony Williams joined the Metropolitan Police Department and the Latino Community in celebrating national night-out in the District. The community had the opportunity to meet their officers and elected officials in many entertainment activities.

❖ Living without violence is your right fair

On October 23, OLA and My Sister's Place provided an array of educational information on resources to combat domestic violence for Latino families. This fair was part of a group of activities that took place during the week of October 18-26 with the purpose of increasing prevention and educating the media, health professionals and members of the political sector on the consequences of violence in families.

❖ Hispanic Heritage month celebration

This past October 6, Mayor Williams proclaimed Hispanic Heritage Month 2004 and unveiled the District's commemorative poster for the occasion. As part of the celebration, the Mayor conducted a program at the Carlos Rosario International Career Center with the attendance of more than 300 government officials and community members. The Mayor's message highlighted the important contributions of Latinos in the District, our cultural and linguistic pride, and the most recent efforts by his administration and OLA to provide more opportunities for Latinos city-wide.

Cosme: Latino Art Beat 1st Prize winner

❖ Fiesta DC

On October 10, at the Cardozo Senior High School Stadium , with the support of OLA, Fiesta DC hosted Hispanic Heritage Month. Many DC agencies, CBOs and private sector institutions partnered in this large event in order to reach, educate and inform the thousands of Latino community members district wide. The purpose of the event was to enhance, promote and assist the artistic and cultural expressions of the Latino community residing in Washington. Fiesta DC also provided entertainment and educational opportunities for the entire families and served as a vehicle to distribute information of public interest.

❖ "Bet you didn't know" multicultural community information fair

On October 16, OLA collaborated with the Department of Human Services in the "Bet You Didn't Know" Multicultural Information Fair, with the purpose of making DC residents aware of the different services currently available to residents of all ages and economic backgrounds. Over 25 DC government agencies, faith-based and community-based organizations partnered to provide residents with information and access to services and college scholarships.

❖ Neighbor's Consejo's new Treatment Center now Open

On September 29, the city's Health Department and OLA cut the ribbon for Neighbor's Consejo's new residential treatment facility on 16th street. Funded by these two city government institutions, Neighbor's Consejo becomes the first and only residential treatment program for people on the path to substance abuse recovery.

Upcoming events

❖ "Thanksgiving and Holiday Activities"

OLA will be conducting, in coordination with several community partners, activities during Thanksgiving and the Holiday season aimed at donating food and providing incentives and information to Latino families. More on this will be announced at www.ola.dc.gov

❖ Mayor's Gang Summit

On November 21st, Mayor Anthony A. Williams and OLA will host a forum to learn about the progress the Latino community has recently made to prevent gang proliferation. Relatives and friends of ex-gang members will share their experiences aimed at educating policy makers and other community members.

The hOLAgram

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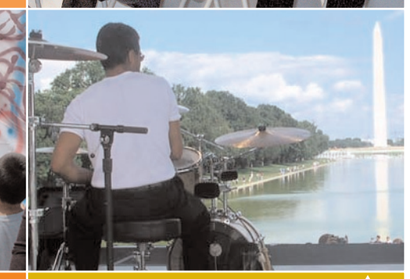
Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration ▲
Oct 6

Latino Family Fair ▼
Aug 18

Celebrating Heritage Dinner
Oct 6

Latino Family Fair ▼
Aug 18



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Co-Sponsored Tito Puente Day.
Aug 7

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