

BOARD MEMBER PUSHES HISPANICS VOLUNTEER FLORIDA! APPOINTEE BRINGS A DIVERSE BACKGROUND

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Ocean Ridge resident Laura Corry hopes that her recent appointment as a board member of Volunteer Florida!, the Florida Commission On Community Service will help encourage more Hispanics to become involved in volunteer service.

In addition, Corry said that she wants to make sure that Hispanic groups throughout the state receive their share of volunteer services.

Corry, who works in the Fort Lauderdale office of the South Florida Water Management District as the Hispanic Outreach Program Manager began her two-year term in April. She succeeded Andriana Comellas-Macretti who moved out of the state.

As a Commissioner, Corry will be help to determine which community agencies will be awarded grants to operate AmeriCorps projects. In addition, she will assist in overseeing the administration of AmeriCorps and other national and community service projects throughout the state.

“I want to strengthen our state’s commitment to voluntary service,” she said. “I especially want to make sure that Hispanics are engaged in volunteerism.”

Corry said that coming from a strong background of family orientation and community service, her fellow Hispanics like to help out in their community. “If they are given direction they are responsive,” she affirmed.

Highlighting the Commission’s work through the AmeriCorps voluntary program and the state’s Point of Light Awards, Corry said that the organization has been very successful in raising up volunteers throughout the state and providing voluntary services to organizations.

“I also want to make sure that voluntary programs serve the Hispanic community,” she said. “Every group should get their fair share of the pie.”

Among her first goals are to help the Commission provide its English-only web site in Spanish and to translate volunteer recruitment materials into Creole to serve the growing Haitian population throughout the state.

The Commission was established in 1994 by the Florida legislature to encourage volunteerism and service by state residents. The organization is directed by a bi-partisan board that is appointed by the governor.

Fellow Commission board member Maria Sanjuan of Hallandale said that she is pleased to serve on the board and she welcome’s Corry’s participation. “Florida should be proud

of the fact that it has one of the leading community services organizations in the country,” she said. “It has been able to set precedents and to share its experience with other states.”

“The Commission has also brought money to the state of Florida as our programs have competed at the national level to obtain grants,” she said.

“Things are happening that have never happened before, especially for the children of Florida,” she said.

Welcoming Corry to the board, she said, “Laura makes things happen. She rolls up her sleeves and does what the organization needs.”

Corry brings a diverse and activist background to her appointment. She is chair of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Palm Beach County, a former participant in the National Hispana Leadership Institute and a member of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Central Florida, the Southwest Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Hollywood Beach Latin Festival. She is Past Chair of the Latin Chamber of Commerce of Broward County.

Corry, who was born in Cuba but raised in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Venezuela, is familiar with the state’s growing Hispanic population. “My position with the water management district involves educating the Hispanic community about the environmental issues related to our water.”

She speaks regularly to leadership groups, schools, civic organizations and on the radio from Orlando to Key West, Fort Pierce to Fort Meyers. “I put about 33,000 miles on my car every year,” she said.

Corry is encouraged by the response to water issues from the state’s Hispanic population. “Many of them come from countries where there isn’t much environmental awareness,” she said. “But I find that when those issues are brought to their attention, they want to be informed and engaged.”

Now, Curry plans on bringing her experiences in raising environmental awareness to the task of motivating Hispanic residents to reach out and serve their fellow citizens.

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