

## **COLOMBIANS FORM CHAMBER CHAPTER FOUNDERS HOPE TO PROVIDE A WIDE VARIETY OF SERVICES**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

The growing population of Colombians in Broward County has led several businesses to form a new Colombian chamber of commerce.

The Colombian Chamber of Commerce of Broward County held its kickoff event on Wednesday, October 9 in Hollywood. The new group counts 25 members, but is planning on attracting dozens more.

“During the recent presidential elections, we registered over 9,000 Colombians in Broward County,” reported James Soto Roca, one of the primary founders of the new organization. “But, we think that there are around 13,000 Colombian residents here.”

Roca said that he has received inquiries from over 50 businesses interested in affiliating with the new chamber.

During 2001, 75 new Colombian companies were established in Broward County, with 45 additional businesses already established during 2002 according to Roca.

“The new chamber will give Colombians in Broward County a focal point to work together,” explained Ivan Piedrahita, an attorney who lives in Coral Springs and is helping the new chamber to get organized.

“We don’t restrict our membership just to Colombians,” Piedrahita said. “We are also inviting people who are interested in Colombia and want to do business there.”

The attorney explained that the organization will also help to orient those who are new to the United States and attempting to become established here. “We are not only helping with commercial efforts, but the chamber is providing a social purpose as well,” he said.

Piedrahita explained that the chamber’s organization is in the early stages. “We are independent from other Colombian chambers in the area, but we maintain loose ties with them,” he said.

“We want to provide a wide variety of services,” he said. “We will be organizing lunches, helping with networking and providing opportunities to exchange business cards.”

“We also want to offer seminars on subjects such as immigration issues, an introduction to doing business in the U.S., information on the business community, tax laws etc.,” he said.

Piedrahita said that many Colombians who immigrate to south Florida “come to an unfamiliar business environment. Things do not function here the way they are used to doing business, and that is an impediment to developing a good business.”

“We want to help people achieve their goals here,” he said.

“There are many people here who have no information about how to open a business,” Roca said. “We also want to help people to introduce new products from Colombia to the United States.”

Currently, Roca and others are working on incorporating and developing bylaws for the chamber.

For information on the Colombian Chamber of Commerce of Broward County, call 954-316-2200 or write to [ccb@directvinternet.com](mailto:ccb@directvinternet.com).

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