

LATIN FLAVOR WESTON HISPANICS SHARE CULTURES WITH AREA'S RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

While many chamber of commerce functions focus on building businesses, others focus on more community-minded objectives.

Take the recent Sabor Latino event sponsored by the Weston Area Chamber of Commerce.

“We are trying to build bridges between cultures,” explained Elaine Vasquez, the chair of Broward County’s Viva Broward celebration of Spanish Heritage Month. “Weston is a fairly new city and it’s 38 percent Hispanic,” she explained. “We are showcasing our culture, our art, music, science and theater.”

The chamber’s annual Sabor Latino is the culmination of the Viva Broward activities and focuses on bringing together the area’s Latin and non-Latin owned businesses.

“The entire month involves 24 different events and benefits 24 charities,” Vasquez explained. “This is the 14th year that we have had the celebration.”

To help celebrate, the event, held on October 15 at the Wyndham Bonaventure Resort and Spa, highlighted several Latin musical groups including Spectrum Music, Pino, Giovy and the folkloric ballet Salpicon.

“All of our girls are from Colombia,” said Cecilia F. Zaiour who directs the Salpicon dance troupe. “We do it to teach the girls our cultural dances and to introduce them to the community.

“We want people to understand the diversity of culture in Weston,” said Jack Miller, president of the Weston Area Chamber of Commerce. “We want people to care about people.”

Polly Wilke, who was elected as this year’s Person of the Year by the chamber, said that there are many Latin American owned companies and business in Weston. “We want to build a good rapport in Weston and appreciate each other’s culture,” she said.

While culture is the focus, any gathering of like-minded entrepreneurs is a good opportunity to do business. “People do a lot of networking at something like this,” explained Lisa Carver Hanks of Plantation who serves on the board of the Weston chamber. “Our chamber involves a lot of mom and pop businesses and we want to put them together.”

Hanks said that if a local small restaurant owner can get to know the owner of a small print shop in the community, “they can get together, save money and keep their cost to a minimum. They can help one another and keep business in the community.”

“We are open to talking, discussing and helping businesses to grow,” Hanks said.

The recent Sabor Latino event was an opportunity for new business people in the community to check out whether membership in the chamber would help them. Virginia Snyder recently relocated to south Florida from Jacksonville and said that she was considering joining the chamber to help her network in the community.

“The chamber can help me make inroads into the community,” said Snyder who is an Account Representative with Tel-Com Solutions Group, Inc., a telecommunications wholesale company.

“I’m trying to decide which chamber to join,” Snyder said, referring to the Weston Chamber and its competitor, the newly formed Weston Business Chamber of Commerce. “This one seems to be more established,” she said. “But, they are different, so I may join both of them.”

“There are all style of businesses in Weston,” Miller said. “We want to do business with all of them.”

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