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January, 2003

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Company President Pepe Martinez Featured In New York Times Article



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While working as a dishwasher at the Hamptons Coffee Company, a cafe in Water Mill, Mr. Martinez took notes on how other employees roasted coffee beans, served customers, bargained with vendors and spoke English. One day, when the manager quit, he asked for the job.

"One of the owners, she said, 'What would people think of a Mexican in front of the counter?'" Mr. Martinez recalled. "I told her people look at me one way when I am cleaning. They will look at me a different way when I am the manager."

He got the promotion and in 1999, bought out that co-owner to become a partner in the business. Now a legal resident, Mr. Martinez, 38, is an owner of two Hamptons Coffee cafes — the other is in Westhampton Beach — and is planning to open a third in Manhattan.

"I had dreams," he said. "I worked very hard."

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JANUARY 5, 2003

South Fork Latinos Flex Political Muscle

By JULIA C. MEAD

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"There are so many, many problems," said Isabel Sepulveda de Scazón, the president of a new political organization for Long Island Hispanics.

Chile, works part time as a private chef in Leon Uriz, the author, and is the host of a Hispanic talk show on public-access television. GLA's executive board includes an artist, a real estate broker, a priest, a construction company owner and a school administrator. Among its most active members and supporters are a restaurateur, a social worker, a gallery owner, a guidance counselor, a beauty salon owner, an elementary school principal and a psychologist.

But for every Latino on the South Fork with a house, a car and a profession, there are hundreds living in poverty with no medical insurance, no education and no regular employment, Ms. Sepulveda said.

In the South Fork's two towns, East Hampton and Southampton, Latinos constitute the fastest-growing ethnic group, with about 12 percent of the population, according to the 2000 census. Since 1990, Southampton's Hispanic population nearly quadrupled, to 8.8 percent. But the census has been widely criticized for undercounting minorities, and Ms. Sepulveda noted that a quarter of East Hampton High School's students are Hispanic.

The dearth of affordable housing forces many Latinos to live in cramped, squalid quarters, Ms. Sepulveda said, and every morning

there are crowds of unemployed men outside a store in Southampton and the lumberyard in East Hampton, waiting to be hired as day laborers.

"There are so many, many problems, and no individual person can fix them," Ms. Sepulveda said. "We have to work together, to speak with one voice. Only then will we have power."

GLA has set an ambitious agenda, with committees assigned to explore such issues as housing, immigration, health care, transportation, education, recreation and government.

As the South Fork moves to accommodate its Spanish-speaking residents, English-as-a-second-language programs have popped up in schools, libraries and colleges, and many businesses and government offices have Spanish-speaking employees who deal with the public.

Southampton Hospital, the region's only hospital, has been sharply criticized for providing no interpreters, but a few months ago it turned for help to the Rev. Luigi Hargain, an adviser to GLA and a member of the Ecclesiological Missionaries, an American Catholic order that works with immigrants, especially Latinos. Now the order's members are either in the hospital or on call around the clock. They also lead a class on ethnic and racial diversity that is mandatory for all hospital employees, and they have volunteered to teach Spanish or English to anyone who wants to learn.

"The hospital is really trying," Father Hargain said. In his view GLA should focus first on breaking down the language barrier. "The power of language bestows the power of dignity," he said. Some of his English students were pharmacists and doctors in their native countries, he pointed out. "But in the United States they clean toilets, wash dishes."

Along with increasing the number of Latinos who can speak and read English, Father Hargain said, GLA must have a political voice if it is to have lasting impact. Ms. Sepulveda agreed, saying that it would be surprising in its approach.

Father Hargain said, "My prayer is that it doesn't become another organization that just talks about nice things. It is demagogic to be given a Christmas turkey, then ignored the rest of the year. Latinos need political clout for their entire community."

One reason Hispanic residents have not yet achieved the political strength to match their numbers is that many came from countries where outspokenness could be dangerous. "They are too afraid to speak up," Mr. Martinez said. "It is good that an organization will speak for them."

Diana Weir, an East Hampton town councilwoman of Puerto Rican and Colombian descent, was the liaison to the town's Hispanic Advisory Committee. She said the committee wrestled with so many issues outside the town's limited purview that its members all declined to be reappointed, opting instead to help form GLA.

"They were frustrated," she said. "All they could do was advise the town. They couldn't lobby in Washington for changes to immigration law or in Albany to tenants' rights."

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