

Prince George's Del. Victor Ramirez, left, Marta Brito Perez, AstroZeneca's vice president of human resource for North America, and Doug Duncan, right, former Montgomery County executive, talk at a party hosted by Enrique Carrillo of Chevy Chase Bank in Illicott City. — Photo by Eric Salzberg for The Examiner



## Business leaders eyeing Hispanic community

By Kathleen Miller  
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Regional leaders rushed in their RSVPs to attend a backyard party last weekend that promised mojitos, cigars, Cuban delicacies like fried plantains and even more enticing — the possibility of contacts in the region's fast-growing Hispanic community.

Host Enrique Carrillo, director of Hispanic banking for Chevy Chase Bank, had more than 200 commitments a week before his second annual Washington-area "Pachanga Cubana," or "Big Cuban Party."

As a proof of the growing economic and political power of the area Hispanic community, the VIPS rushed to sign up: Representatives from the White House and Gov. Tim Kaine's administration, Maryland Attorney

General Doug Gansler, Washington Board of Trade President and CEO Jim Dinegar and the consuls general of Bolivia, Guatemala and Mexico.

"This is the fastest growing population in this region," Dinegar said. "The topic of the day isn't immigration, it isn't foreign aid, it's business."

Dinegar is planning a regional economic conference in June to teach local business leaders about how they can tap into the Hispanic market. He said he came to "take notes."

Washington has the second-highest median household income for Hispanics in the whole country — beaten only by Baltimore, according to census data released last year. The median household income for Hispanics is \$60,170 in Baltimore and \$58,945 in Washington, which still lags behind Washington's overall median household income of

\$78,970.

Board of Trade officials say Hispanics will constitute one in every three newcomers to the Washington area over the next five years.

"People come for camaraderie, they come for a mojito, but they also come because Latinos are in the mainstream and we're succeeding," Maryland Del. Victor Ramirez said. "Local leaders are realizing the importance of that and how it can bring prosperity for everybody."

Bolivian Consul General Oswaldo Cuevas said the presence of so many local leaders at a Hispanic event is heartening, despite the tense local debate about illegal immigration.

"It shows a recognition that Latinos are moving the economy," Cuevas said. "Our people are not just the construction workers, we are big consumers too. Trust me, we like to spend."

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