

# THE DAILY RECORD

## A networking event over mojitos and Cuban sandwiches

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When Enrique and Maria Carrillo heard rain might ruin their annual Pachanga Cubana, Maria said a friend told her to cross two knives and point them north to ward off bad weather.

She lit candles, too.

"It didn't work," she said. "You cannot fight against nature. You can have a plan, but nature can have another plan."

Rain did soak the Carrillo's pachanga, Spanish for party, held in their spacious Ellicott City home's backyard, dotted with white tables and umbrellas around the kidney bean-shaped pool, but it didn't stop some of the area's most influential Hispanics from lingering over mojitos and Cuban sandwiches.

Once the rain stopped, entrepreneurs, bankers, business owners and politicians made their way outside to network under tents plastered with the logo of the party's sponsor, Chevy Chase Bank, where Enrique Carrillo is director of Hispanic banking.

Sunday's event was the second Pachanga Cubana thrown at the couple's brick home since they moved to Howard County from Detroit, where they had held four similar parties. Maria Carrillo, a doctor who specializes in pulmonary critical care, said when they moved to Maryland two years ago, the most important thing was finding a good pachanga house.

Old friends Doug Duncan, former Montgomery County Executive, Marta Brito Perez, vice president of human resources at AstraZeneca, and Del. Victor Ramirez, D-Prince George's, looked at home as they chatted outside.

"Where is the music? Where's the pig? Where are the cigars?" Duncan asked.

After learning that music and cigars would be on tap later, but there would be no pig roast, Duncan switched topics to ask Chevy Chase Bank Vice Chairman Alex Boyle about business.

"We've had better years," Boyle said. "We're mortgage lenders, so business has slowed down dramatically."

Oswaldo Cuevas Gaete, consul general to the embassy of Bolivia, said Enrique Carrillo has been a good friend to his community.

"I am a diplomat, but my job is not only to have a relationship with the government, but with the people," Cuevas Gaete said. "The saying is you have to have a lawyer friend, a banker friend and a policeman friend."

In his role at the Montgomery County-based Chevy Chase Bank, Carrillo has implemented change in order to be that "banker friend" to the Hispanic community, which is steadily growing in Maryland, according to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. In keeping with the bank's "Hablamos su idioma" — "We speak your language" — philosophy, Spanish-speaking customers can now get service in 26 branches or get help on the phone.

The Carrillos' accountant, Manuel Alfonso, lives in Michigan and flew in for the party, which he said has expanded in its new location. More than 150 people showed up for this year's pachanga.

"It's about introducing good friends to business partners and new people to the bank," Alfonso said. "It's also introducing people to mojitos. That's very important."

"This will be one of the hottest parties around here in two or three years," he said.

Yanet Semidey, owner of Avant Garde, a bathroom decorating firm in Washington, can attest to the growing popularity of the Carrillos' party.

"I got eight or nine calls from people to see if they could get invited to the Pachanga Cubana," she said.

Her parents, Semen and Aida Semidey, provided the party's cigars from their Washington and Montgomery County stores, President Cigars.

Last year a photo of Yanet smoking a cigar at the party got published in the Washington Post and brought customers into the shop, Aida Semidey said.

That kind of success story was just what Enrique Carrillo hoped the pachanga would provide, he said as he tried to grab a bite to eat late in the afternoon in between hellos, goodbyes and introductions.

As Carrillo got his first taste of rice and beans, ropa vieja — a meat dish that translates to "old clothes" in Spanish — and plantains about 15 minutes later, he said, "That's just the life of a host."



Marta Brito Perez, left, vice president of human resources with AstraZeneca, talks with host Enrique Carrillo, center, and former Montgomery County Executive Doug Duncan Sunday at Carrillo's annual Pachanga Cubana.