

Hispanic professionals group sees Reno as fertile ground

BY PAT PATERA

The National Hispanic Professionals Organization based in Texas took one giant step to Reno in its quest to start 13 new chapters this year.

Rosa Garza, who had attended leadership training with the network, is Reno chapter catalyst. The Northern Nevada

Hispanic Chamber of Commerce named her Hispanic Business Woman of the Year in 2005, and she brings a background working in non-profit housing programs and as a consumer advocate.

Hispanics in Reno — first and second-generation immigrants — need leadership training, says Garza. Rather than just follow orders, they could learn to be proactive, to make suggestions in the workplace. It's a cultural mindset she'd like to see change. Rather than be content with meeting basic survival needs, she says, they can embrace the idea that, "There's nothing wrong with moving up."

March 1 is the launch date for the non-profit, which provides leadership, education and training for Hispanic professionals seeking career advancement opportunities. The local Hispanic Chamber of Commerce will help with the kick-off event, says JR Gonzales, national executive director.

Reno looks ripe for a chapter because it boasts the fastest-growing Hispanic population per capita in the nation, says Gonzales.

Yet only two Hispanic organizations serve that market: the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and Hispanic Services.

Reno offers a welcoming environment for Hispanics, he says, and ample job opportunities in a region hungry for employees.

While area Hispanics can join any number of existing networking groups, most groups are devoted to a specific industry discipline.

"There's nothing wrong with moving up."

— Rosa Garza

"This group brings a lot of disciplines together," says Gonzales. And, it presents educational seminars along with networking functions.

The fledgling Reno chapter will get seed money from the national group. Dues are \$25 per year individual, \$250 business and \$1000 corporate. Member companies benefit, says Gonzales, from a front row seat on recruiting professional employees.

Network founder Ben Mendez says, "I based my initial strategy and reasons for starting this organization on my belief that people are more comfortable doing business with people they know. NHPO assists in establishing these relationships."

But while Hispanics are the largest and the youngest minority group in the nation, census figures show that less than 13 percent have a college degree. So as a group, Hispanics meet with limited professional opportunities.

Yet an NHPO membership survey showed that 87 percent attended college and enjoy an average household income between \$75,000 and \$100,000.