



“TODOS BIENVENIDOS A WOODBURY!” **(EVERYONE IS WELCOME TO WOODBURY!)**

Councilwoman O’Connor’s Woodbury History Lesson **Hispanic Heritage Month** ***September Edition***

My neighborhood is a vast multi-national community with families from Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Nigeria, Nicaragua, Mexico just to name a few. This month, the Mayor’s blog is a platform to embrace the Hispanic culture. The City of Woodbury, in conjunction with the rest of the nation, recognizes September 15th -October 15th as HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH. It allows our Nation to reflect on how the Hispanic and Latin culture has added to our heritage in multiple ways and contributed to the amazing fabric of our city specifically.

The dates are very significant. September 15th marks the anniversary of independence for five Latin American communities: Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. In addition, the official independence dates for Mexico and Chile are September 16th and 18th, respectively.

The observance of this key celebration began in 1968 when President Lyndon B. Johnson was authorized by Congress to issue an annual proclamation for a one-week National Hispanic Heritage Week. Two decades later, it was expanded to a one-month long format that celebrates the contributions of Americans that trace their country of origin from Spain, Mexico, Central American, South American and

the Spanish speaking nations of the Caribbean.



We are familiar with many of the famous history makers and entertainers like Tito Puente, Carmen Miranda, Selena, Carlos Gardel and Celia Cruz. Today, we also have amazing athletes from Latin America or of Latin American descent, who have actually been responsible for some of the most historic moments at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games:



Gymnast Rebeca Andrade overcame multiple obstacles to become the first woman from Brazil to win a medal in artistic gymnastics in the history of the Olympics.

Jasmine Camacho-Quinn is from South Carolina but ran for Puerto Rico, where her mother was born. She made two countries proud by winning Puerto Rico's first ever gold medal in track and field.

Miami native Ariel Torres makes history as the first Cuban-American to ever compete in Karate at the Olympics.



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Woodbury's Hispanic and Latin Heritage

Through the participation of our own residents, we will have an opportunity to celebrate Guatemala, Mexico and Puerto Rico three of the many countries here. Our courageous neighbors overcame many things in order to make Woodbury their home. "People seem to think that we come to this country to steal or take jobs away when, really, many Latinos are working jobs that most Americans don't want."

Some experienced discrimination, physical attacks and being told to go back to their country. However, many said they have met a lot of nice people in this country as well and I do like how tranquil it is here overall. Despite the original challenge, a resident said "I am from both places. I've lived more than half of my life here in the United States. I have lots of love for this country, but my roots are in Guatemala. I was born there, and my culture is there. It's beautiful to be from two cultures because you can mix the two together.

When asked about the transition into living and working in the US one person mentioned, "I feel happy because my children are going to school here, and they have better opportunities than the ones I had in Guatemala. But it's also difficult for us immigrants because we leave some family members, like our parents, behind in our home countries and we can't see them anymore. The good thing is that we can help them economically while working in the U.S. by sending money back." For many it was a joy to have the ability to say 'thank you' via financial support for the first time.



Mexico's culture is influenced by its rich combination of Aztec and Mayan and European cultures.

Marco Coronado, a local entrepreneur, shared his story. His family has been in Woodbury for five years after moving from Deptford, NJ. He is originally from Mexico. The existing diversity of Woodbury is what drew him here. He has played a key role to the growth of this community. He has helped new residents with translation and resources. At his business El Manantial (which he explained means water spring or a source of life) anyone can buy groceries, prepared meals or relax and watch sports.

He is excited to see the growth of residents from Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Peru, and Ecuador add to the diversity in Woodbury.



Puerto Rico officially the **Commonwealth of Puerto Rico** (Free Associated State of Puerto Rico') is a Caribbean island and an unincorporated territory of the United States.

Ana Rentas is one of several of my neighbors who have a Puerto Rican family heritage. As a 14 year resident of Woodbury, she has faced the ups and downs of multi-culturalism. Her family was seeking a quiet place to live. When visiting various towns, her children fell in love with Woodbury. So, she decided to live here. After working hard to successfully provide for her family, she enjoys her grandchildren.



Guatemala is a country with years of Mayan and Spanish culture.

To help us learn more about our Guatemalan residents, I was able to speak with Catherine Navas-Folgar who is a rising senior attending Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ. She was born and raised in Woodbury and is currently preparing a research project focused on the Guatemalan American community in Woodbury.

A common factor that drove their decisions to live in Woodbury was the presence of family members who were already residents. Some arrived between 1989 and 1997.

Greis Interiano who moved to Woodbury from California, originally came to America in 1990 said, “I remember there being very few Hispanics when I came to Woodbury. As for Guatemalans, there were maybe only about 10. In 1994 and after, more Guatemalans started coming to Woodbury as their family members would receive them here. That’s how the population kept expanding. As of now, I feel very good about what my husband and I have accomplished through working here. We reached the American Dream when we bought our first house here.”

“This project is very valuable to me as a Guatemalan American because it is a way to share and document my story, my family’s story, and the story of so many other Central American immigrants whose stories have yet to be told to large audiences. As a tween and teenager, I longed to learn and read about my history and other LatinX stories. Now, I can finally be a part of the change I want to see.”
– Catherine Navas-Folgar

Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month during a Pandemic

Regardless of our own ethnicity, we can enjoy the diversity and culture of our Spanish Speaking neighbors. Don’t let the month pass you by without doing SOMETHING to increase your own personal diversity and awareness. Here are a few ideas for you to join in!

LEARN THE CULTURE AND LANGUAGE!

The Spanish language is one the most commonly used languages learning it adds to your conversational skills in your personal and professional life. The internet offers many conversational Spanish lessons or download a learning platform app that teaches languages at your pace. You can even learn the “old-school” way by studying with a book!

Woodbury is very lucky to have an organization dedicated to assisting all residents to transition which has been serving South Jersey since 1976. Evergreen Family Success Center is located at 21 Delaware Street or online at www.hispanicfamilycenter.com They accept volunteers and have Spanish speaking staff to assist you. Their mission is to provide “a broad range of culturally relevant social services and advocacy programs that support and encourage empowerment and self-sufficiency.”

CELEBRATE THE CULINARY DELIGHTS!

There are awesome food choices that can ‘flavor’ your personal culinary tour of the Hispanic culture!

Invite your friends to a fiesta! Experiment with your favorite recipe for empanadas, tacos, and burritos – complete your feast off with a flan (egg-based, sweet custard dessert that is often topped with caramel)!

Broad Street is your ‘go-to’ location to purchase Hispanic specialty items: visit Town Market (830 N Broad Street) and Vallarta House (1101 N. Broad Street).

If you aren’t interested in hosting your own tasting party, just *make reservations!* EL MANANTIAL at 17 S. Broad Street is a great, local choice for freshly prepared Mexican food which also has a convenient grocery store in front of the restaurant.

They even have karaoke on Friday evenings – grab a mike and sing your favorite tune – in whatever language you prefer!

READ A BOOK BY AN AWARD WINNING SPANISH AUTHOR!

‘Ordinary Girls’ by Jaquira Diaz or ‘The House on Mango Street’ by Sandra Cisneros are just a few to pick from the library shelf or at your local or virtual bookstore!



Remember, our collective family tree is made of beautifully diverse branches!