



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham Commemorates Hispanic Heritage Month

PETE HARCKHAM October 11, 2022

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Montrose, NY – New York State Senator Pete Harckham marked Hispanic Heritage Month recently by honoring five outstanding members of the community during a special ceremony at the Hendrick Hudson Free Library.

“The Hispanic community is such a huge part of the Hudson Valley,” Harckham said. “Members of the community have made significant contributions to the arts, culture and the economy. The individuals we honored have worked hard for years to help the Hispanic community and to benefit our nation as a whole. They have more than earned this New York State Senate distinction.”

Harcckham presented State Senate proclamations to Luis Coronel, president of the Peekskill & Cuenca Sister Cities Corporation; Luisa Granda-Rodriguez, director of operations and community engagement, Neighbors Link; Jorge Merchan, president of the Ecuadorian Civic Committee of Westchester; Dora Ocha, executive director of Fundación Hanami; and Maria Olivier-Flores, interim acting director of LEAP (Learning Enrichment Activities Program), Peekskill City Schools.

Luis Coronel is the founder and president of the Peekskill & Cuenca Sister Cities Corporation, which sponsors sports, cultural and economic exchanges between the two communities. The organization also focuses on helping the young people of Peekskill by providing safe recreational and cultural activities.

Luisa Granda-Rodriguez is the Director of Operations and Community Engagement at Neighbors Link. She has brought together thousands of immigrant families, volunteers, allies, other non-profit organizations, government officials and many other resources to further the mission of Neighbors Link.

Jorge Merchan is the founder and president of the Ecuadorian Civic Committee of Westchester, which provides services to the Hispanic community, raises awareness about Hispanic businesses and helps build a better understanding of the Ecuadorian culture. It sponsors such cultural events as the annual Ecuadorian Festival in Croton Point Park and the annual Ecuadorian Song Competition.

Dora Ocha is the founder and Executive Director of Fundación Hanami, which is a non-profit organization dedicated to delivering programs and services aimed at economic and social inclusion. Its priorities are the vulnerable and underserved Hispanic communities in Westchester. During the pandemic, Hanami distributed food in 34 communities throughout Westchester. Volunteers from the organization personally delivered food to members of the community who were quarantining at home and unable to go out.

Maria Olivier-Flores served as Parent, Family and Community Liaison for the Peekskill City Schools, where 73% of the students have a Hispanic background. She was instrumental in the success of the school district's "Saturday Academies," which provided educational and fun activities for children and parents alike. Currently, as the Interim Acting Director of LEAP (Learning Enrichment Activities Program), Maria is responsible for organizing and implementing the school district's extended-day initiative for students and families; these include providing students with academic enrichment focusing on STEAM, homework assistance and creative arts and recreational activities.

"It's an honor to receive this award," Ochoa said. "I dedicate this award to all those who volunteered to help those in need. In all our efforts, Senator Harckham was there to help, whether it was making protective masks available or making sure that state emergency help lines were also in Spanish."

"Thank you to Senator Harckham for recognizing the work we are doing at Neighbors Link for immigrant empowerment and inclusion," Granda-Rodriguez said. "It takes an incredible amount of courage and resilience to leave everything you know to build a better life for your family. We are grateful to Senator Harckham and our community partners for joining us to create a welcoming community where all residents can feel that they belong."

Hispanic Heritage Month is an annual celebration of the history and culture of the U.S. Hispanic communities. The celebration, which spans from September 15 to October 15, commemorates how those communities have influenced and contributed to American society.

To view a video of the Hispanic Heritage History Month award ceremony, click [here](#).