



Business

R.I. reaches out to Latino entrepreneurs

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Acelia Adaligisa Terrero, a native of the Dominican Republic, center, and her daughter Alejandra Murray operate a bakery and deli on Broad Street, Providence, that was created with the help of the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation.

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PROVIDENCE — Relying on \$500,000 in loans, Acelia Adaligisa Terrero transformed a small catering business operated out of her kitchen into a popular bakery, restaurant and banquet hall housed in a historic building on Broad Street that she purchased and refurbished three years ago.

Terrero, who immigrated from the Dominican Republic in 1984, said the loans were crucial to her success, and she is quick to credit her many benefactors: the Bank of Rhode Island, the U.S. Small Business Administration, the Providence Economic Development Partnership and the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation.

But despite their eagerness to help, Terrero said, securing the money proved challenging and her success has rarely been replicated in the neighborhood.

“I got it because I’m a very tenacious woman,” Terrero recalled recently, sitting beside a glass case

displaying her Cuban beef stew, Puerto Rican custard and mashed plantain. “It was very difficult for me because of the lack of information in Spanish. It would have been impossible if I couldn’t speak some English.”

The independent and governmental agencies that assist small businesses appear to be getting that message. As Latino businesses proliferate in Providence, Central Falls and Pawtucket, resources to support them are increasingly being advertised and delivered in Spanish.

Last month, Every Company Counts — the EDC’s small-business program — hosted its first lecture delivered in Spanish and aimed at Latino merchants.

The event, held Feb. 7, drew about 70 people, many of whom learned about it from fliers advertising it in Spanish. The EDC also pitched the tax seminar in a Spanish-language e-mail, and on a Spanish radio station, Latina 100.3 FM.

In January, the EDC hired a fluent Spanish speaker, Claudia Cardozo-Tarullo, to improve its outreach to Latinos. Beginning in May, she will edit a Spanish newsletter and help launch a Spanish version of the Every Company Counts Web site, everycompanycounts.com

“We don’t want these Hispanic businesses falling through the cracks,” said Sherri Lynn Carrera, the operations manager for Every Company Counts, which was created in 2004. “We want them to have the same opportunity as every other business.”

The EDC is already planning a second Spanish-language workshop that will discuss the importance of creating a business plan, as well as seminars catering to the preferences participants in the Feb. 7 program expressed in a survey.

“Sometimes they don’t really understand all the resources available to them,” said Cardozo-Tarullo, who immigrated from Colombia in 2002. “We need to help the Latino community to succeed and to connect with the American market.”

The Rhode Island Small Business Development Center, a business training agency based at Johnson & Wales University, has also been increasing its Spanish-language offerings.

In 2002, while still based at Bryant University, the center started a Latino Business Initiative. Those efforts have intensified since July, when the center moved to a headquarters in downtown Providence that is more accessible to would-be business owners who rely on public transportation.

Courses taught in Spanish are filling up so fast that at least one — Primer Paso (First Step), a 13-week workshop about how to start a business — is being offered simultaneously in Providence and Central Falls.

“Traditionally, all the material and workshops were in English,” said Adriana I. Dawson, a regional director for the SBDC who recorded her voice-mail greeting in Spanish and English. “What people failed to realize is you have a large, growing non-English-speaking community that is extremely entrepreneurial.”

The center now employs four bilingual staff members, a response to what its executive director, John Cronin, calls a “demographic imperative.”

“We have seen a lot of potential in the Latino businesses we serve,” Cronin said. “It means a lot to the community to have the Spanish option.”

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