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15 Years for Hispanic Resource Center

By EMILY RAMSEY
Managing Editor



FILLING A NEED: Sara Martinez, left, the Hispanic Resource Center's (HRC) first coordinator, and Heather Stack, interim HRC coordinator, stand in the HRC located at Martin Regional Library, 2601 S. Garnett Rd.

EMILY RAMSEY for GTR Newspapers

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As Tulsa saw its Hispanic community start to grow in the late 1990s, the need to cater to that community became apparent. Thus, the Hispanic Resource Center (HRC) was born in November 1999 and, this year, celebrates its 15th year, or quinceañera.

“The HRC was created as a way for the library to respond to a specific community in order to meet its needs,” says Sara Martinez, who joined the library as the resource center’s first coordinator.

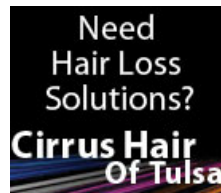
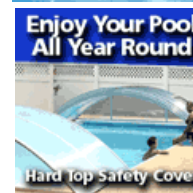
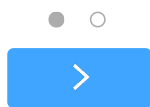
While Spanish-speaking resources are available throughout the library system as well as bilingual library employees, the Martin Regional Library, 2601 S. Garnett Rd., was selected as the center’s “hub” due to the large amount of Hispanic individuals living in the area, Martinez continues.

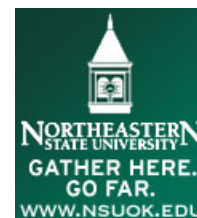
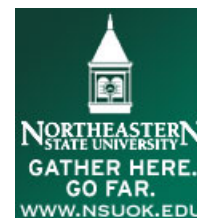
However, that does not discount the large Latino populations in other greater Tulsa areas, including Kendall Whittier, Brookside, Owasso and Collinsville.

A portion of Martin Library is dedicated to the HRC and features Spanish language books and access to resources that immigrants or non-English speakers may need. This includes many free services, such as ESL (English as a second

Hispanic Research

What's your plan to engage the Hispanic market? Ask our panel.





language) and GED classes through the YWCA, computer courses, bilingual storytime, health fairs, legal aid, insurance and employment application assistance, and more.

Martinez spent 15 years living in Mexico and is bilingual. When she joined the HRC, one of her first priorities was to create a place that those in the Hispanic community would feel comfortable frequenting.

“New immigrants are often hesitant to get involved with the government at all. Often, the library is the first government place they will come to,” says Martinez.

With that fact in mind, she went about ensuring that the center had a number of bilingual employees and resources that target that community.

“Obvious effort has been put in to making this the hub,” says Heather Stack, interim HRC coordinator. “We have a mom who comes from Owasso for bilingual storytime because she likes this library and the resources better.”

Stack is bilingual and spent two years living in Panama while working with the Peace Corps.

For most Hispanics coming to the U.S., “the number one thing they want is to learn English,” Martinez says. “So we make sure those resources are available. They also want their kids to be successful and to learn English.”

To remain current, the center utilizes a database to analyze which materials are in highest demand. However, Martinez is quick to ensure that classic Latino materials remain available at the HRC, not allowing those books to be moved out in favor of more current, popular items. “Young Latinos may grow up unfamiliar with their cultural background and big historic moments. We want to maintain access to classic Latino materials that are important to the Latino culture and heritage so as to preserve cultural memory,” she says.

In addition, the HRC regularly receives visits from nationally-known Latino authors including Matt De La Pena, Ruben Navarrette with the Washington Post, Pam Munoz Ryan, and Gustavo Arellano, the author of the syndicated column “Ask a Mexican.”

In October, the HRC welcomed back Roberto Suro, who was the first individual to speak at the HRC after it opened. Suro spoke about young people’s power to create change and about the positives that immigrants bring to an area, referencing examples where immigrants have moved into blighted communities and saved them, says Martinez.

On Nov. 6, author Carmen Lomas Garza will speak and lead a workshop.

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The banner features a smiling couple in the center. The background is a warm, golden-brown color. The text is arranged in a clean, modern layout with a mix of fonts and colors (white, black, red, and gold).