

Hispanic Heritage Month is a fiesta of events and cultural recognition

By Julio Urdaneta

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First proclaimed by President Gerald R. Ford in 1974, Hispanic Heritage Month celebrates the various contributions of the Hispanic community to everyday life.

The celebration started Sept. 15 and ends Oct. 15, 31 days that see the anniversary of independence of

seven Latin American countries and a Columbus Day commemoration. Hispanic Heritage Month serves as a vehicle to raise awareness of the Hispanic culture and its positive influence in American society.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Hispanics comprise 14 percent of the population of the United States. Research estimates that this group will number 53 million inhab-

itants in 2020 and 80 million in 2040. The majority of foreign-born Hispanics in the United States come from Mexico, Cuba, El Salvador and Puerto Rico, according to the U.S. Census.

Throughout Connecticut, government and advocacy organizations have made sure the celebration doesn't go unnoticed. Gov. M. Jodi Rell declared National Hispanic Heritage Month "to raise awareness of the

many contributions that state residents of Hispanic heritage have made to the civic life, culture and economy of Connecticut," she said in a press release. "The Hispanic population, especially in Connecticut, is growing stronger and stronger every day. That is why it is my honor to encourage all Connecticut residents to participate in this annual celebration."

This is the fourth consecutive year

Rell has declared National Hispanic Heritage Month in Connecticut.

"The Hispanic community in Connecticut is made up of business leaders, teachers, lawyers, government officials, artists and other leaders and activists who continue to make a tremendous impact on our society," Rell said.

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In New Haven, Hispanic arts organization Arte Inc., 19 Grand Ave., has set up a calendar of activities to celebrate the month. For details, call 469-4536.

Among the events is a music and art exhibit. Every year, Arte Inc. chooses a theme from Latin culture to feature on their Hispanic Heritage Month activities. This year is about music.

"Latinos have been internationally recognized for our music. We believe that those who speak Spanish live by music; we are surrounded by music," Executive Director Daniel Díaz said.

Concerts and trips for high school music students will be part of the celebration, as will be showcases of music from Latin America and Spain. "We will have a show at the Knights of Columbus Museum with Valeriano Ramos, a local talent. We want to connect with talents from New Haven but we also want to honor Spain, our motherland, with flamenco."

According to Díaz, a month is not enough to celebrate all the cultures of the 21 countries of Latin America, all represented in the United States.

"For me, it should not be a month, it should a yearlong celebration," Díaz said. "We are too large of a community. I believe,

however, the celebration is not only about what we have acquired as a community, from where we came from to where we are, but more about where we are going. We have grown socially, economically and politically and that is something we have to celebrate."

Julio Urdaneta is editor of Registro, the Register's Spanish language newspaper.