

Napa Hispanic Chamber of Commerce named best in state

ALEX LOYOLA
Sep 3, 2013

Just four years old, the Napa Hispanic Chamber of Commerce is the state's Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of the Year.

The award was announced last month at the annual California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Convention Gala in Oakland. The three-day event, held at the Oakland City Center Marriott, featured over 3,000 entrepreneurs, small business advocates and corporate representatives.

"I couldn't believe it," said Marisa Loza, the president of the Napa Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. "We've only been around for four years, and we were competing with chambers in the Silicon Valley, Sacramento, and Los Angeles, which are much larger."

"I thought they were kidding," Loza said. "We brought some wine for the event from Latino-owned wineries, so we thought, 'It must be the wine!'"

The California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce is a network composed of more than 65 Hispanic chambers and business associations across the state. It is the largest regional ethnic business organization in the nation dedicated to promoting economic growth.

Loza was informed of the honor only hours before awards were officially handed out. During the past year, Napa's Hispanic Chamber of Commerce had increased its membership by 40 percent.

In order to qualify for the statewide award, chambers were required to submit evidence of community involvement.

"We included fliers and photos from all of the different events we helped promote," said Loza. "We just tried to show them everything we could."

"We have all kinds of businesses as members. There are wineries, insurance agencies, immigration consultants, and auto shops, as well as corporations," said Loza. "The Napa Valley College and Queen of the Valley are also part of our group."

Loza, a longtime member of the Napa Hispanic Chamber, is an immigration consultant and small business owner. She took over the role of president from financial adviser Gerardo Martin, who remains on the chamber's board of directors.

Board members include chamber secretary Angie Canchola with Wine Valley Insurance and Ines De Luna, division supervisor for the Napa Superior Court. De Luna was the first Latina elected to the St. Helena Unified School District board of trustees, and is the vice-president of the Napa County Hispanic Network.

The group helps sponsor and organize events throughout the year aimed at supporting heritage programs within the community. The Dia de Los Muertos and Mexican Independence Day celebrations, Latino Heritage Month (Sept. 15 to Oct. 15 this year), and “Corazon Latino” Latin music showcase all help promote both business and culture.

The Napa Hispanic Chamber lists upcoming events and workshops on its interactive website and Facebook page, as well as profiles its members to increase their online presence, said Loza. “We also spend time on local television and radio.”

“We also help our members get involved with the Napa County Chamber of Commerce,” said Loza. “We teach them how to market themselves and gain access to business capital, then help them take the next step.”

A study conducted by the California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, in conjunction with UC Berkeley’s Haas School of Business, found that almost

80 percent of Latino business owners expect their businesses to grow, according to a recent press release.

The same study found that nearly 60 percent of the state's 700,000 Latino businesses plan to hire additional workers. It is estimated that California's these businesses earn \$100 billion in annual revenue.

"Business owners expect to make significant business equipment or technology purchases and more than half said most of their employees are also Latino," said Dr. Guido Minaya, a board member of the California Hispanic Chambers of Commerce who led the effort for the study.

This story was updated. The president of the Napa Hispanic Chamber of Commerce is named Marisa Loza.