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New D.M. groups assist Latino, black business owners

*Blake Brianna
Staff*

The two affiliates are designed for minorities, but others are welcome as well, organizers say.

By BRIANNA BLAKE

REGISTER STAFF WRITER

The newly formed **Latino** and African American affiliates of the Greater Des Moines Partnership will benefit minority as well as mainstream members, organizers say.

Tonight, the partnership will launch Alianza, a **Latino business** association whose members will enjoy all the benefits of the umbrella partnership with a separate association designed to meet their specific needs and interests, Alianza president Jorge Morales said.

"The (**Latino**) **businesses** are growing so much there's a need for some kind of home office for Hispanic people to come and attend seminars and workshops to help them become more successful," said Morales, who owns Midwest Auto Electric Co.

"The stability of **Latino businesses** reflects the stability of the entire community. We're going to offer classes, workshops, and seminars that no one else is offering. Everything will be held in Spanish."

Minority-owned firms have unique issues and challenges, said Ted Williams, a member of the African American **Business** Association and co-principal of the Williams Group, a national management and consulting group based in Des Moines.

Although the two affiliates are geared toward minority **business** owners, organizers said mainstream **business** owners are also welcome to join.

"The name of the game is access," Williams said. "It's not who you know, it's who knows you."

Even discussions leading to the two affiliate launches have resulted in

business opportunities for members, said Jim Wallace, chief executive of GuideOne Insurance and chairman of the Partnership's Minority **Business** Coalition Committee. Wallace contracted with viva! communications, a bilingual ad agency, after meeting company principal Nannette Rodriguez in a planning meeting for Alianza.

"It was a great resource, and a strength that we just didn't have," Wallace said.

Rodriguez said a second or third generation Hispanic-American who may not speak Spanish would still benefit from the **Latino Business** Association.

"Members will have the opportunity to market their products and establish relationships with the Hispanic-owned **businesses** and vendors," Rodriguez said.

Partnership officials said the affiliates are the result of more than a year of discussions with **business** owners in the community.

"We took a hard look at the demographics of our membership in relation to the demographics of the overall population, and we certainly don't have the representation of those communities within our organization," said Mary Bontrager, executive vice president of the partnership. "This is an opportunity to bring exposure to all **businesses**, both ways."

Bontrager said the new affiliates will have their own board and bylaws.

Talks of a possible affiliation are also under way with the Iowa Asian Alliance, a **business** association based in Des Moines, said Kim Poam Logan, executive director of the alliance.

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Inauguration

The inauguration will be held tonight at 7 at the Greater Des Moines Partnership building, 700 Locust St., in the Arthur Davis conference room. A similar launch of the African American **Business** Association will be planned in October. A discounted rate will be available to new members.

On the Web

Visit the Greater Des Moines Partnership Web site at www.desmoinesmetro.com.

Photo_By: GARY FANDEL/THE REGISTER:

Working: Jose Ramos, owner and editor of El **Latino** Newspaper, works in his office at 1722 E. Grand Ave in Des Moines. Ramos is the vice president of Alianza, a **Latino business** association that is an affiliate of the Greater Des Moines Partnership.

Photo: Williams

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