

# Latino Forum moves forward with Latino Community Center

For immediate release

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DES MOINES – A future Latino community center in central Iowa has moved one step forward.

There will be a press event at 9 a.m. Friday (Jan. 31), as members of the Latino Forum sign the organizing document that will oversee the governance of the Iowa Latino Community Center. The event will take place at Hispanic Educational Resources, 828 Scott Ave. in Des Moines.

“This first step represents the hard work of the past and present leaders of our community,” said Dawn Martinez Oropeza, executive director of Latinas/Latinos Al Exitó.

The community center initiative is part of the Latino Forum of the Urban Core, which was formed through the Capital Crossroads strategic plan effort (<http://www.capitalcrossroadsvision.com>) to ensure the Des Moines metro has the right balance of workforce, community and economic components to make it the best in the nation. The forum is made up of members and supporters of the Latino community, business owners and professionals, government representatives, advocacy groups and service organizations.

The purpose of the center is to give Latinos a place of social and cultural identity. It also would serve as a communication bridge with the greater Des Moines community, be a place where community efforts could be coordinated, and would provide leadership and developmental programming.

Latinos make up an ever-increasing part of the Des Moines-area and Iowa’s population. This group includes multi-generational lifelong residents of Latin American descent, newly-arrived immigrant families, and individuals and professionals from Latin American countries.

The Latino population has increased almost 96 percent from the 2000 U.S. Census to almost 163,000 residents as of July 2012, or 5.3 percent of Iowa’s 3 million residents, according to the State Data Center of Iowa. In Polk County, the Hispanic/Latino population has grown 34,887 residents in Polk County.

The Des Moines area lacks a community center to serve this rapidly growing section of the state’s population. In the 1980s, the United Mexican American Community Center and Hispanic Educational Resources were created and housed at 828 Scott St. This building served as a community center for the Latino community before it became a location where educational programs were provided for low-income and immigrant Latino children.

A couple of years ago, the HOLA Center, which provided direct and centralized services to the Latino community, closed because of lack of financial support.

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