



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

Harckham Commemorates Hispanic Heritage Month

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October 15, 2021

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Sleepy Hollow, NY – New York State Senator Pete Harckham marked Hispanic Heritage Month this week by honoring four outstanding Latinas in the 40th Senate District during a special ceremony at Village Hall here hosted by Sleepy Hollow Mayor Ken Wray.

“I congratulate our honorees for their hard work and continued achievements,” Harckham said. “Their success strengthens our communities and serves as an inspiration to countless residents as well. These four individuals represent an enduring part of our country’s ever-evolving immigrant story, which has contributed so much to the rich diversity of our district, state and country.”

Harckham presented state Senate proclamations to Ruth Ayala-Quezada, Diana Loja, Dinora Pacheco and Karine Patiño—a small business owner, community liaison, lawyer and nonprofit founder. A special certificate of recognition was presented to Flavio Loja of Justin’s Deli Café in Sleepy Hollow as well.

Ruth Ayala-Quezada was born in Peru and immigrated with her parents to the United States in 1986. She grew up helping her parents, owners and operators of Ernie’s Taxi in Mount Kisco, and eventually started her own company, Carmel Taxi, with her sister. The business has grown considerably—Carmel Taxi now has 20 employees and 15 taxis—and in 2010 it became a state Certified Non-Emergency Medical Transportation provider. Among recognitions Ayala-Quezada has received are the Entrepreneurial Spirit Award and the Established Trailblazer Award.

Diana Loja serves as a liaison between municipalities, communities and businesses to connect the public to cultural and educational workshops, social events, government assistance programs, and nonprofit outreach. Diana was born in Ecuador and immigrated to the U.S. when she was 12. As community liaison for the Village of Sleepy hollow, Diana is passionate about providing assistance to residents on such issues as job opportunities, food assistance, shelter, loan application and more. Recently, Loja launched her own Spanish news media platform to capture and report upon pressing issues impacting the Latino population.

Dinora Pacheco was born in the Dominican Republic, where her desire to help people led her to a nursing career and then a position on the health staff of the Dominican President. After immigrating to the United

States, she met her husband Freddy in Sleepy Hollow and moved to Peekskill, where she dedicated herself there to helping local residents in need. Pacheco co-founded the Peekskill Hispanic Community Corporation, an organization that helps food insecure families, conducts certification classes and raises funds for international crises. Today, she is president of the PHC. The group also hosts Peekskill's annual "Hispanidad" celebration, which brings together the arts and culture of our rich Hispanic community.

Karine Patiño was born in Sleepy Hollow and has lived her entire life in Mount Kisco, the first-generation daughter of Ecuadorian immigrants. Patiño began her service to the community by volunteering with Neighbors Link and assisting the Mount Kisco Police Department with the creation of Police and Community Together, a program that has been used in training more than 300 officers in cultural competency. As a student at Pace Law School, she spearheaded the first "Street Law en Español" legal workshops at the school, and after becoming an attorney opened a law office in Mount Kisco specializing in immigration and criminal matters. Patiño joined the Putnam County Legal Aid Society in 2017, and recently was appointed to both the Westchester County Police Reform and Reimagining Task Force and the Westchester County Hispanic Advisory Board.

"I am honored and humbled to be part of this group of talented and extraordinary women, who inspire all of us to do more," said Patiño in accepting her proclamation. "I am incredibly proud of my Hispanic heritage. Hispanic and Latinx individuals come from diverse social, economic and geographical backgrounds, but what brings us together, in big part, is family, and with that, community. I believe these gifts from my culture are strengths that can help future generations achieve their goals."

Although Hispanics make up almost 40 percent of the Westchester County population and 20 percent nationally, Patiño added, they remain disproportionately underrepresented in many important career paths and in government. As a Latina lawyer, she represents a group of only two percent of all lawyers identifiable in the U.S.

Hispanic Heritage Month is an annual celebration of the history and culture of the U.S. Hispanic communities. The celebration, which spans from September 15 to October 15, commemorates how those communities have influenced and contributed to American society at large.

To view a video of the Hispanic Heritage History Month award ceremony, click [here](#).