

NOPD names liaison for Hispanic relations

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Ana Gershanik

The New Orleans Police Department's appointment of an official Hispanic liaison will have a significant impact on the Hispanic community.

The liaison, Janssen Valencia, will serve in collaboration with Puentes New Orleans Inc., Catholic Charities-Hispanic Apostolate Community Services, Crimestoppers and United Way for the Greater New Orleans Area.

Valencia is a public information officer who has worked for NOPD for 12 years. Police Superintendent Warren J. Riley made the announcement at a media gathering, along with Lucas Diaz, executive director of Puentes; Martin Gutierrez, executive director of Neighborhood and Community Services at Catholic Charities; Gary Ostroske, CEO of United Way; and Darlene Cusanza, executive director of Crimestoppers.

The liaison position is a result of the Hispanic Public Safety Initiative, a collaboration among community nonprofit partners, community members and NOPD, which was financed by Baptist Community Ministries and United Way of America. It is one of several efforts aimed at improving relations between the Latino community and law enforcement.

These efforts also include the exploration of expanded cultural-awareness training and development of adequate interpretation services for NOPD officers.

Strategies under discussion by this collaboration align with national practices, and "give us the best chance toward ensuring that public safety for all members of our community is addressed in an inclusive manner," Riley said.

Valencia was born in New York City to Colombian parents, who returned to their native country so their children would have a closer exposure to their native culture. He attended school in Colombia and settled in New Orleans in 1986. Valencia finished high school at Bonabel and worked in different businesses before joining the police force in 1997. His wife, Corina, is Honduran-born and the couple has a daughter, Raquel.

Valencia has been working with Catholic Charities in the area of public safety since Hurricane Gustav. He has been a translator for many years and has been assisting other police officers with Latino crime victims. He frequently talks about public safety programs on Spanish radio stations and is trying to reach more Latinos through churches and other organizations to teach them about public safety and the prevention of crime.

"I love New Orleans," Valencia said. "I feel a deep attachment to this city and hope to continue living here and help to improve the community and the relationship between the Latinos and the police department."

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Artist Jose Maria Cundin is showing his works about "The Unanimous Declaration of Independence of the United States of America" through July 11 at Galerie Gigi, 627 St. Peter St. The exhibit features Cundin's original hand engraving of The Declaration of Independence. A limited number of prints are available to the public.

Cundin founded Millennia, an international fine arts press dedicated to the publication of documents that have served as cornerstones of liberty.

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Officer Janssen Valencia, public information officer for the New Orleans Police Department, is the NOPD's new Latino liaison.