

EDITORIAL

It's time for Hispanic business leaders

The announcement at the last Patchogue Village board meeting that the chamber would be forming a Hispanic Business Leaders Committee raised our interest.

It's a good move and not because these leaders would be a separate arm of the chamber, but because the intent is to take part in Patchogue's future as well as become a voice for other Hispanics in the community who don't know what a chamber is or are uncertain.

We sat down with Jose Bonilla, who owns Bravo Supermarket and La Confianza, a delicatessen and restaurant, both next to each other on South Ocean Avenue.

Bonilla has carved out good businesses with both and has been a business owner since 1997.

"We want to be stronger with the chamber," he said. "Not separate."

Businesses like Bonilla's and also Gallo Tropical Restaurant, which opened in 2002 with 45 seats, are good examples of strong leaders who have made an impact. Manager and owner David Bustamante and his family now own the building. And the restaurant is a huge success. Dahlia Fashions, a relatively new business owned by Barbara Guerra that is doing well, commented in this week's story about the new committee that its time has come.

According to a 2010 census, 29.6 percent of Patchogue Village residents are Hispanic. That translates to 3,488 of 11,798 residents. And that is a 4-year-old census.

Mayor Paul Pontieri was asked if the village had reached out to Hispanic leaders about becoming involved as trustees. And he said yes, but the problem was some may not be documented or those who are, are working so hard they can't spare the time.

Maybe that is about to change.

More Hispanic young people are working at the Patchogue-Medford Library now than ever before, said Patchogue-Medford Coordinator of Spanish Language Outreach Jean Kaleda.

Greater Patchogue Chamber of Commerce Executive Director David Kennedy said that hopefully the Hispanic business leaders will want to move up and become future officers, like president.

The chamber is taking the right step in encouraging this committee. Villages thrive when they are diverse and involved and Patchogue's upswing reflects this.

Kudos.