

Fresno's Downtown Business Hub unveils Spanish instruction

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From left to right: Ismael Herrera, member of the Board of Education for Fresno County; Martha Rosas, CEO of America Hispanic Communication Group; Dora Westerlund, CEO of Fresno Area Hispanic Foundation and Diana Enriquez, director of Instituto Novohispano celebrate the opening of the Spanish-language school. Spanish reading, writing and speaking skills are quickly becoming invaluable tools in the corporate world and local business leaders say the Central Valley is a prime location for building a workforce for the future.

“We know the importance of Spanish,” said Dora Westerlund, CEO of the Fresno Area Hispanic Foundation. “Lots of companies call in looking for bilingual individuals.”

While many of the region’s residents know how to speak Spanish, very few have the language skills necessary for a business setting. To fill this void, the group has joined with the America Hispanic Consulting Group to open Instituto Novohispano.

The school will use textbooks and resources from Spanish-language publishing group Santilana USA to teach children ages 6 to 12 how to read, write and speak Spanish.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new school was held today at the Downtown Business Hub, and classes are scheduled to begin May 2. Students will meet each Saturday at 10:30 a.m.

Diana Enriquez, director for Instituto Novohispano, said the school has already seen a lot of interest from families and has at least seven children already enrolled. The program has a capacity for up to 12 students and will open more

classes as necessary, she said.

“Our goal is to teach the Spanish language in the correct way. It’s not enough to just speak Spanish in the home,” Enriquez said. “Children need to read and write it in order to truly be bilingual.”

Martha Rosas, CEO of America Hispanic Consulting Group, agreed, and said the organizations have been working for nearly a year to open Instituto Novohispano.

School tuition is \$150 a month, but she said the group is offering some scholarships and estimates that nearly 10 percent of students qualify for the funding.

Demand for Spanish-language education has increased rapidly as more companies realize the potential of the relatively untapped Hispanic market, said Luis Chavez, board member for Fresno Unified School District.

“With private sector companies trying to reach out and connect with Spanish speakers in the Hispanic community, it’s important that we’re trying to prepare students for the global economy,” he said.

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