



February 10, 2010

Conference aims at helping Latino students

*By Howard McEwen
Enquirer contributor*

HIGHLAND HEIGHTS - Educating Latinos for Kentucky's Future, a group dedicated to informing Latinos about post-secondary educational opportunities, is holding its first conference on the campus of Northern Kentucky University today and Friday.

"The goal is two-fold," said Leonel Calderon, NKU's director of Latino Student Affairs. "The first goal is to have a college fair schedule for Thursday for middle- and high school students. The second goal is to have a conference for professionals which will start on Thursday evening and Friday. Topics of discussion will include educational issues, workforce development and policies."

Calderon said he wants the conference to give the middle- and high school students a chance to learn more about how they can prepare to go to college.

"Hopefully the people attending the conference will learn about the unique opportunities and challenges that exist in our communities," he said. "There are individuals and communities alike that are doing exceptional work and we need to learn from them. At the same time, there are barriers that we need to address collectively."

Jason Riveiro is the Ohio director for League of United Latin American Citizens, a sponsor of the conference. The group's national president, Rosa Rosales, will be the keynote speaker at the event.

"We've always been supportive of education but we're looking to expand our group in Kentucky and get more people involved in the organization," said Riveiro. "We want to make people more aware of the lack of recognition of Latinos in diversity topics at the state level in Kentucky."

He said Frankfort doesn't consider the needs of Latinos "mainly because the state doesn't count Latinos as a separate group."

Senior music major Gabriela Castillo's family settled in Louisville in 1998 when she was 11. She said her parents immigrated to the United States from their native Cuba because "they really wanted to have more economic freedom."

"Right now the most important thing is the Kentucky diversity plan," she said. "I'm interested in it because they don't include Latinos as a minority. Up until now it only includes affirmative action for African-Americans. If Latinos are included, universities would be given assistance to recruit and retain Latinos."

Calderon believes it is important for NKU to host this event.

"There are still many challenges that Latinos and other groups are facing," he said. "However, I think it's critically important to have a diverse workforce and it starts with education."
