


Hispanic Health Council, Inc. 

# MILESTONES

## 1978~1999



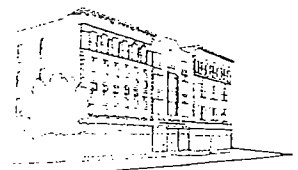
Written by Merrill Singer  
**with assistance from**

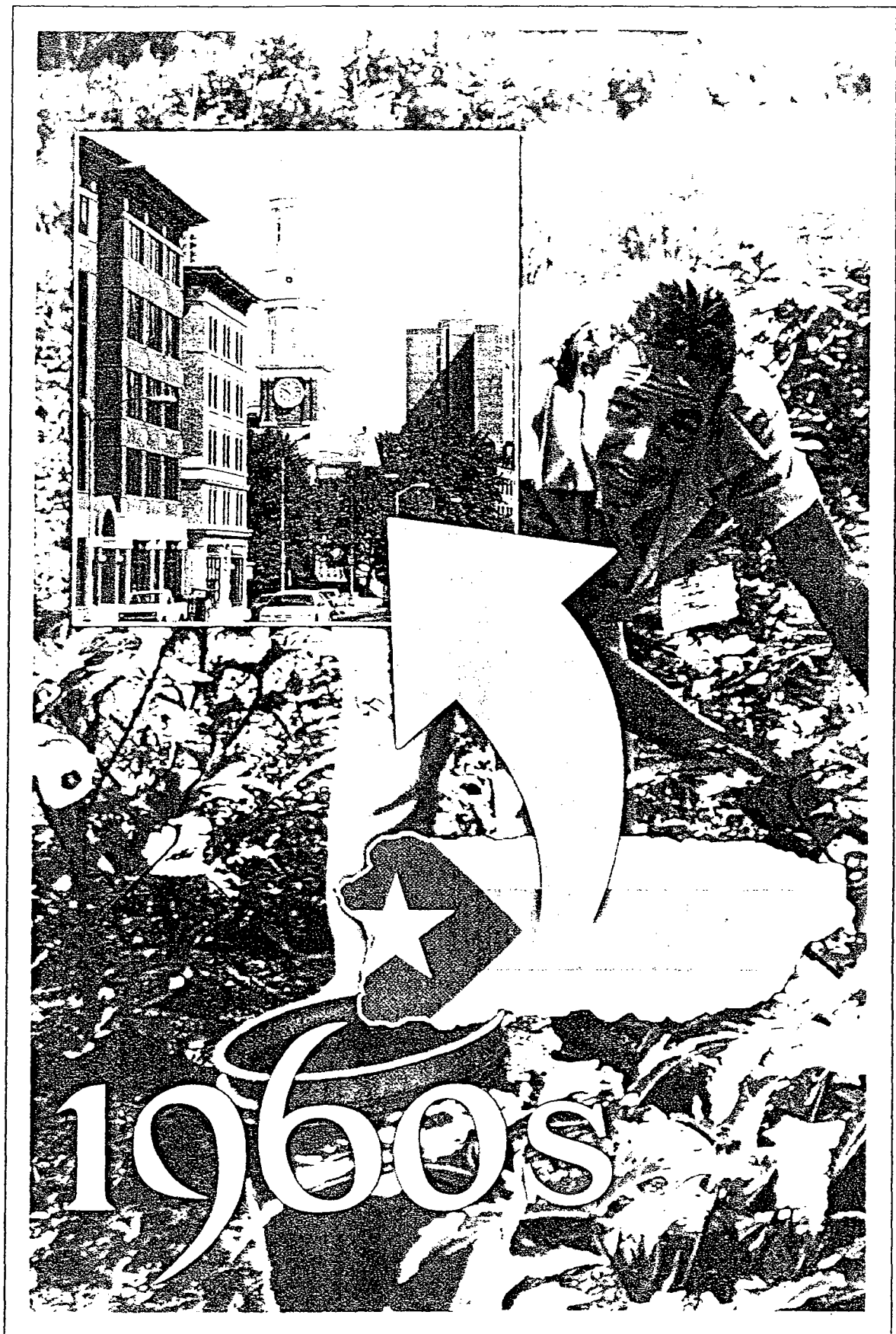
*Rolando Martinez • Laura Victoria Barrera • Grace Damio • Maria Serrano • Carmen Dosal*

**Designed by Harby Bonello**

## HHC MILESTONES 1978-1999

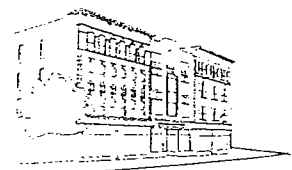
- The history of the Hispanic Health Council is rooted in the significant increase in Puerto Rican migration to the greater Hartford area after 1960, initially by people employed in farm labor in the tobacco fields north of the city.
- In response to discrimination, poverty, and cultural and linguistic conflicts, by the early 1970s members of the growing Puerto Rican community of Hartford had begun to establish their own community organizations, including La Casa de Puerto Rico.
- In January 1973, Rosa Marta Rivera, an 8-month old child died at 3 a.m. in a police car on her way to the emergency room at St. Francis Hospital, a victim of the lack of responsiveness of the health care system to the growing presence of a large, low-income Spanish speaking population in the city.
- In response to this death and other community complaints about access to quality health care, La Casa de Puerto Rico formed the Puerto Rican Health Committee to address the significant cultural and linguistic barriers between the Puerto Rican community and the health care system. Maria Gonzalez (Borrero), president of the board of La Casa and an employee in Hartford Hospital's Department of Employee Development, headed the committee.
- Through negotiations with Hartford Hospital, the position of "clerk-interpreter" was created as well as Spanish and cultural competency classes for some staff. These important "first steps, however were not followed up with significant institutional changes, and the energies of the Health Committee were diverted into other pressing community needs, especially in education."
- In the summer of 1976, Stephen Schensul, an anthropologist with the University of Connecticut School of Medicine, met Maria Borrero and the idea was hatched to work together to make the health care system more responsive to the needs of the Puerto Rican community. The Health Committee began meeting again, and representatives from various institutions, agencies and the community were added, including Mildred Torres and Josh Smith from the Community Renewal Team, Peter Jessup from Hartford Hospital, Ray Petty from the Hartford School System, Henrietta





Bernal of the Visiting Nurses Association, Adriana Falcon from La Casa, and Laura Victoria Barrera, a student at Central Connecticut State University. With the help of Perti Peltó of the Department of Anthropology, University of Connecticut and several anthropology graduate students, the committee turned its attention to studying and documenting the health and mental health needs of Latinos, including the use of various health care resources by Puerto Ricans. Other issues addressed by the committee included organizing for testing for tropical diseases in Hartford's Puerto Rican population, cultural sensitivity in the health care system, school-based health clinics, building a community health resource center, community health education, and expanding the pool of bilingual/bicultural nurses.

- This effort led to the development of an NIMH research proposal designed to carry out a broad community study of Puerto Rican health beliefs, behaviors, and health care adaptations. The proposal was funded in October 1977. At the same time, the Health Committee was also engaged in various other education and advocacy projects focused on making the health care system more responsive to and appropriate for serving the Puerto Rican community. In the late Spring of 1978, with a variety of initiatives in process, committee members decided to submit a proposal to the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving to support a full-time program director. This proposal was funded and Maria Borrero was hired to fill this position.
- With this funding base, the Hispanic Health Council was born and became an independent incorporated organization dedicated to "improving the quality and accessibility of health, mental health and education related services in the Puerto Rican/Hispanic community." The new organization came into being with an activist spirit, a commitment to social change, a dedication to serving the community, and an abiding respect for the dignity of oppressed. Later in 1978, Jean Schensul joined the staff of the Hispanic Health Council, and eventually became its Associate Director. Offices for the new organization were rented at 99 Main St., at the gateway to the Park St. Puerto Rican commercial and residential center.
- The new organization, with only six full-time staff, but a tremendous amount of energy and good leadership, began working on a series of new projects, including building a





# The Hartford Courant

By David H. Rhineland and Elissa

January 20, 1973

## Health Care in City Decried in Tot's Death

The death early Wednesday morning of eight-month-old Rosa Maria Rivera points up the need to reorganize the way medical care is provided to poor families.

That is the view of Dr. Joseph J. Heiser, director of the pediatric outpatient clinic at the Hartford Hospital and a faculty member of the University of Connecticut School of Medicine. The infant girl died in a police car on her way to the hospital at 5 a.m. Wednesday, having been summoned to the hospital by her mother, Mrs. David M. Rivera, at her home at 94 Vine St.

don't have their own doctors on a 24-hour basis. Care, now, he said Friday, is fragmentary. The city runs "well child" clinics at the Beaman Health Center and the hospitals each has its own programs.

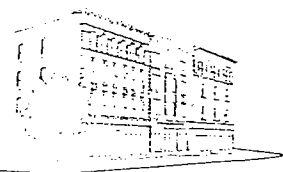
But none provide round-the-clock care on a going basis — except through the emergency rooms. The clinics, he said, need to be reorganized along the lines of a doctor's office so that an individual family would have coordinated care from the same staffers so that these patients could avoid the emergency room.

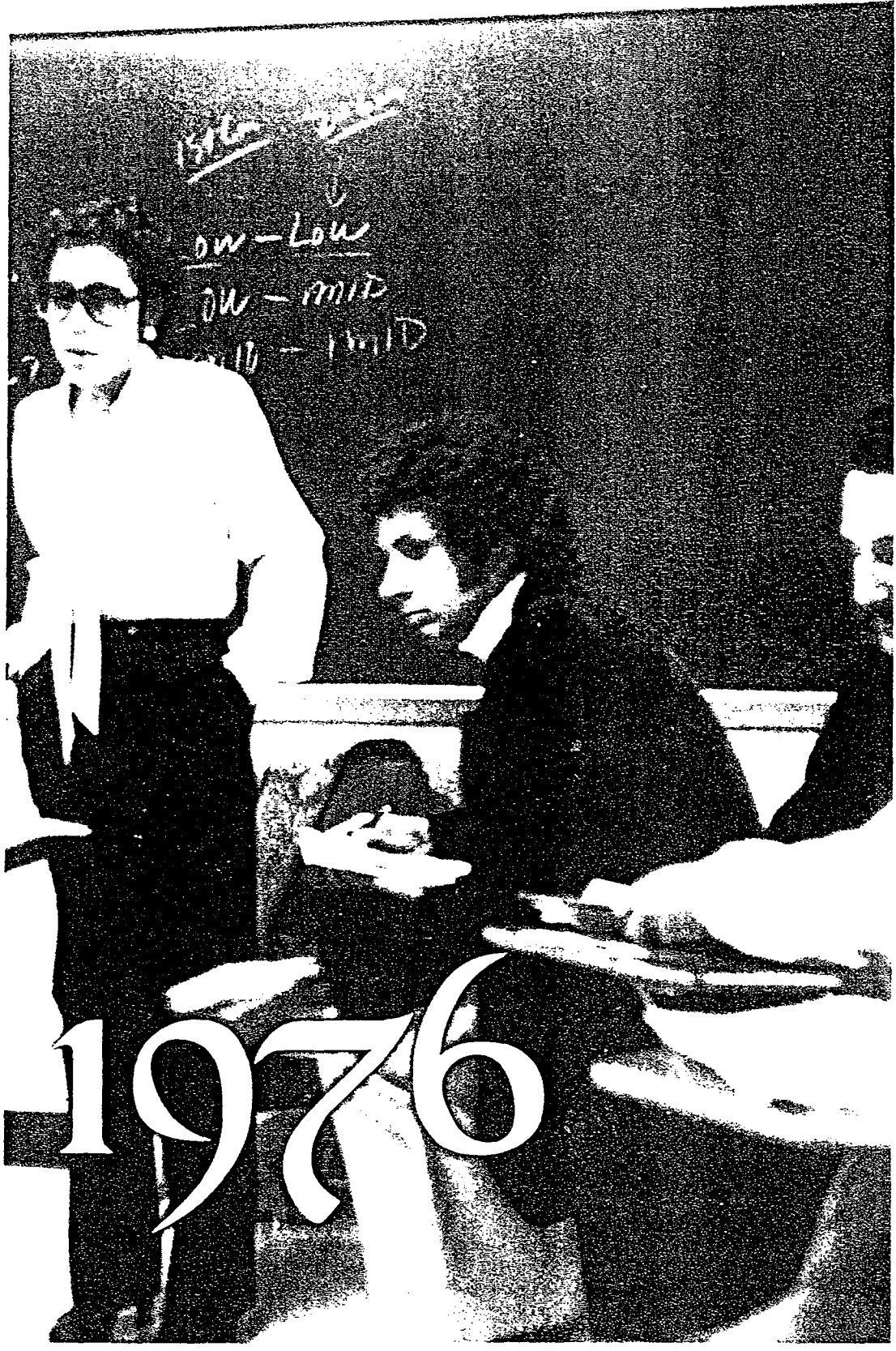
The Hartford Hospital doctors are asking permission to establish a new program to provide care for poor families.

A Hartford Courant reporter

Puerto Rican health resource and education center, the ARRIBA Crisis Intervention Program, a schistosomiasis parasite screening program at Quirk Middle School, participation in the Hartford Area Health Education Center (AHEC), and a planned studies of asthma, otitis media and Espiritismo as a folk healing and social support resource. The Council also joined in a community effort to develop the Charter Oak Clinic to serve the primary health care needs of low income residents in the Charter Oak and Rice Heights housing projects.

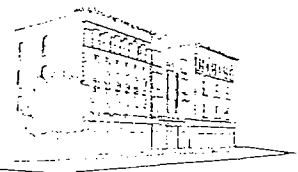
- Besides Maria, Steve, Jay and Bert, among the earliest employees, anthropology interns, and affiliates of the Council were: Victoria Barrera, Eugenio Caro, Maria Roman, Carmen Santiago, Nelson Liriano, Virgilio Escalante, Peter Guarnaccia, Lisa Allen, William Dressler, Kevin O'Reilly, Henrietta Bernal, and Pura Justiniano.
- Although during its first three years the Council did not define itself as a direct service providing organization, by 1982, with the ARRIBA and Hartford AHEC programs this was beginning to change. Community crisis intervention, student counseling, and referral had joined research, advocacy and training as part of the Council's expanding mission. The Council became known as a champion of progressive causes, lending its support to the struggles against discrimination and for social justice. In the Fall of 1982, the Council received its first United Way grant, a one year grant to establish the Familias Unit to provide family counseling, health care referral, community education, and provider education about the Puerto Rican community. The Council also moved its offices to 98 Cedar St. in 1982, where it initially occupied one floor one side of the building. Over the coming years, it would grow to occupy all three floors on both sides of the building, until this space too was inadequate.
- An important new direction for the Council began in 1982 with the initiation of nutrition research. In partnership with the University of Connecticut Department of Nutritional Sciences, the Council conducted a study of infant feeding practices in the community. Also in 1982, the Council's first publication came out, a chapter in the book Latina Women in Transition that examined Puerto Rican women's experiences with "La Operacion" (sterilization through tubal ligation), including the finding that many women did not understand that they were being permanently sterilized. In the





Fall of 1982. Merrill Singer and Lani Davison joined the Hispanic Health Council family. he as an NIMH postdoctoral fellow conducting a study of espiritismo as an indigenous treatment system for alcoholism. and she to assist in grant writing and program development.

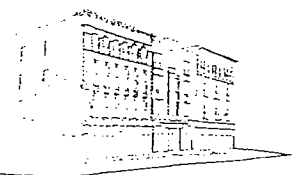
- By 1983, at the ripe old age of 5 years, the Council's budget had grown to \$300,000. Maria Borrero was still the Director and Jay Schensul the Associate Director. During this year, the Comadrona program on maternal and child health — which is still a core program — became firmly established, taking as its model the traditional birth attendant of Puerto Rican culture. In 1983, the Council began working on the AIDS epidemic. At this point, the epidemic was only two years old and little was known about the disease, but the Council's community health educator, Candida Flores, initiated a series of health education sessions on AIDS to Latino audiences throughout the state of Connecticut.
- 1984 marked the beginning of the Council's work in substance abuse research and intervention with projects that focused on Puerto Rican adolescent drinking and smoking behavior, directed, respectively, by Merrill Singer and Jean Schensul. The Council's research on drinking behavior among Puerto Rican adolescents led to a series of Peer Leadership projects designed to build resiliency for substance abuse prevention among Hispanic youth. The Council's first citywide health fair also was held in 1984, with a focus on pregnant women. Additionally, during 1984, a special issue of the journal Urban Anthropology focused on the Council and reported findings primarily from the Hispanic Mental Health Project was published and widely distributed by Council staff.
- In 1985, the Council organized a large statewide conference on Alcohol Use and Abuse among Hispanic Adolescents, one of the first of a number of large health conferences it has organized over the years. Out of this conference came the Council's first book length publication, with articles by Tom Blake, William Colon, Roberto Garcia and a number of other providers concerned with youth and substance abuse issues. Council work on child abuse and neglect also began in 1985 through Project Esperanza, a program funded by COSSMHO, the National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Service Organizations.





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- By 1986, the Council had grown to a full- and part-time staff of 25 people and occupied 7,500 sq ft of office space. In its annual report that year, the Council boasted having six hard disk drive and six floppy disk drive computers. Also during this year the Council launched the project "Prevention of Child Maltreatment among Puerto Rican Adolescents with a Health and Human Services" grant and co-sponsored with Steve Schensul's Center for International Community Health Studies an international conference entitled "Children of the Inner City: Programs Needs and Strategies."
- In 1987 the Council opened Clinica Atabex, a reproductive health clinic specially designed for Hispanic women and initiated its National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism-funded study of the natural history of drinking among Puerto Rican men directed by Merrill Singer. In February of 1987, Jean Schensul left the Hispanic Health Council to found the Institute for Community Research, thereby creating the Council's most frequent collaborator in community health research. The initial collaborative projects of these two organizations as well as the Urban League and the Hartford Health Department were two AIDS Community Research Group studies of HIV/AIDS knowledge, attitudes and risk behaviors in several Hartford neighborhoods and housing projects.
- In October 1987, the Council began a major new AIDS initiative that led to the development of the Hispanic Package on AIDS Prevention, Education, and Outreach in Hartford and the Northeast. This package consisted of eight separate AIDS projects designed to achieve a major impact on AIDS awareness and risk reduction in the Hispanic community. To support this broad effort, the Council organized and hosted the Funder's AIDS Luncheon on December 7th and formally unveiled its package to potential program funders. During this period, Maria Borrero left the Council after a decade of service. After a period of transition under the supervision of Marta Moret, the Council's former receptionist, health educator, and deputy director, Candida Flores became the new executive director. Under Candida's leadership, the Council significantly expanded its commitment to the development and implementation of direct service programs designed to address unmet needs among disadvantaged inner city populations.

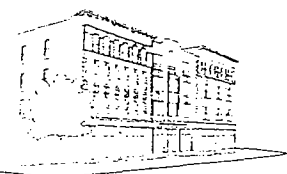




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- Throughout most of 1988, many Council resources were focused on grant writing, consortium organizing, and negotiation with funders interested in the Hispanic AIDS Package. During this period, AIDS grants were ultimately submitted to and funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the Centers for Disease Control, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Aetna Foundation, and the State of Connecticut Department of Health Services. As a result, the Council began and has continued ever since to offer AIDS education, prevention, HIV testing and counseling, community outreach and referral, and support services for infected individuals.
- Continuing its work in nutrition, in 1989 the Council was chosen as one of seven sites for a national study designed to document the level of hunger among low-income families with school age children. Findings from the study lead to the formation of a Task Force on Hunger by the mayor of Hartford, which, in turn, lead to the establishment of the City of Hartford Food Policy Commission, a permanent advisory body to the City Council.
- In 1990, the Council organized the Women's Community Alliance for Recovery, a broad based consortium initiative designed to address the growing problem of substance abuse during pregnancy. The first project of this 25 member consortium was Project Recovery, a comprehensive ambulatory drug treatment program for pregnant women supported by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. A related project specifically for monolingual Spanish speaking women called Cuidate Mujer, was funded through the federal Office of Substance Abuse Prevention. Both of these initiatives grew out of a series of Hispanic women's health awareness and personal development projects at the Council, including Cosas de Mujeres and Mujeres en Accion.
- A major event for the Council June of 1991 was the Northeast regional conference it organized called "Chemical Use and Dependency among Latina Women" at Hartford College for Women coordinated by Lani Davison. Keynote speakers included Dr. Marilyn Aguirre-Molina from the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and Dr. Rafaela Robles from Puerto Rico. A second conference, "From the

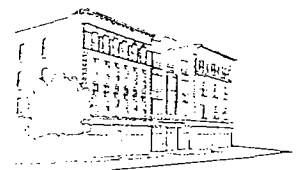


1987



Island to the Mainland, Latino Women's Dialogue on Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Freedoms" was held in November of 1991. In the face of a major economic recession, the Council by 1991 grew to a full time staff of 31 people. In May of 1991, the Council began its Latino Gay Men's Health Project, which continues as part of its ongoing fight back against the ravages of the AIDS epidemic. Also during this period, the Council helped to create the Community Alliance for AIDS Programs (CAAP), a working consortium of AIDS-involved community organizations, drug treatment providers, and the Hartford Health Department.

- In 1992, the Council launched Hablemos de Salud (Let's Talk About Health), a community radio program. In addition, during this period, the Council's long period of collaboration with the Hartford School System was extended to include the Home School Liaison Program, initially at Betances Elementary School and later at the Maria Sanchez School. This program, under the direction of Carmen Dosal, is designed to promote Hispanic parental participation in the educational process and heighten the involvement of Hispanic children in school activities. In 1992, the Council began its annual health fair, an event that has grown consistently in size and importance with as many as 100 participating organizations and thousands of community participants.
- In 1993, after six years as the Council's executive director, Candida Flores moved on to work for Connecticut's Governor as an assistant on urban affairs. The Council began a search for her replacement, during which, Merrill Singer, the Deputy Director, was appointed to serve as Acting Executive Director, a position he held for over a year. During this period, the Council launched a major initiative to address the issue of growing violence among Hartford's youth. The goal of this initiative was to establish a youth center through which to implement a range of educational, developmental, recreational and prevention programs. Additionally, during 1993 the Council formalized its commitment to promote breast feeding through the development of a culturally tailored breastfeeding peer counselor program and a bilingual peer counselor training manual. This program later merged with a Hartford Hospital effort to create a unique community/clinical model of breastfeeding promotion. Also during this period the Council completed its purchase of and relocation of its forty full-time staff to a spacious new headquarters at 175 Main St., just a stone's throw from the site of its original small storefront office.





*Alcohol And  
Pregnancy Don't  
Mix!*

*Alcohol Abuse During  
Pregnancy Can Cause  
Birth Defects.*



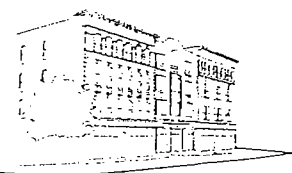
*For More information on  
the risks of drinking during  
pregnancy contact*

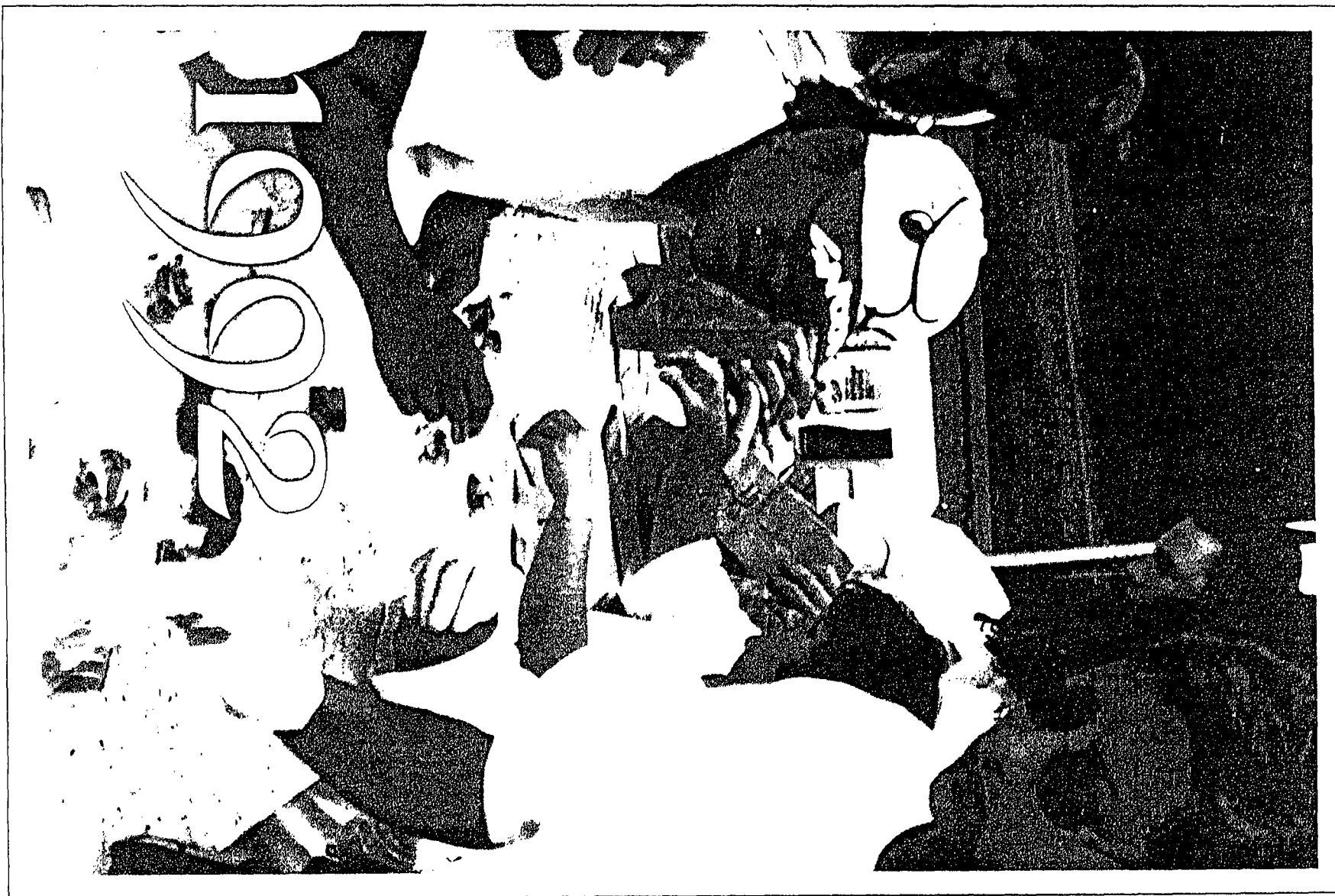
*The Connecticut Program Hispanic Health Council  
527-0856*

*Sponsored by Puerto Rican Health Council and  
Connecticut Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission*

1990

- In September of 1994, Rolando Martinez, the former Social Services Director at St. Francis Hospital, became the new Executive Director of the Council. Rolando quickly initiated a program designed to restructure the Council's administration and unit-level coordination to allow for future growth and development, began working on an organization-wide computer networking system, and significantly improved the staff's employee benefits package. Also at this time, the Council made a commitment to significantly expand its research program through the creation of a distinct Department of Research under the direction of Merrill Singer. One of the first new projects of the Research Department, in conjunction with the Institute for Community Research, was a three year evaluation of the Hartford Needle Exchange Program. Over the next five years, this department alone grew to twenty-five staff with multiple research projects focused especially on substance abuse, HIV, other infectious diseases, and nutrition. While various funders have supported this effort, the National Institute on Drug Abuse has been especially important.
- In 1995, the Council completed renovations for the new Clinica Atabex on the ground floor of 175 Main St. This modern new clinic, implemented in partnership with Planned Parenthood, offers a range of reproductive health services to Hispanic and other low income women. During 1995, the Council's Research Department carried out an assessment of HIV care needs for people living with AIDS in the Hartford, Tolland, and Middlesex Counties of Connecticut for the Hartford Health Department through the Ryan White HIV Care Act. Also during 1995, Rolando Martinez was appointed to serve as co-chair of the greater Hartford Ryan White Planning Council, which oversees the implementation of new programs designed to meet the health and social needs of people living with AIDS.
- In 1996, the Council expanded its target population for direct services to include the elderly through its Ancianos program. Also during this year, the Council, in partnership with the University of Connecticut Family Nutrition Program, published "A Preliminary Report on Community Nutritional Problems among Latino Children in Hartford, CT." This report presented the findings of a study of nutritional problems among Hispanic families with young children, complementing other nutritional promotion and education work at the Council through the work of Grace Damio, coordinator of the Council's

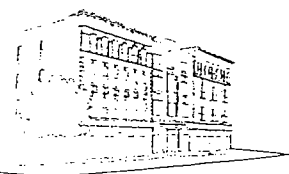


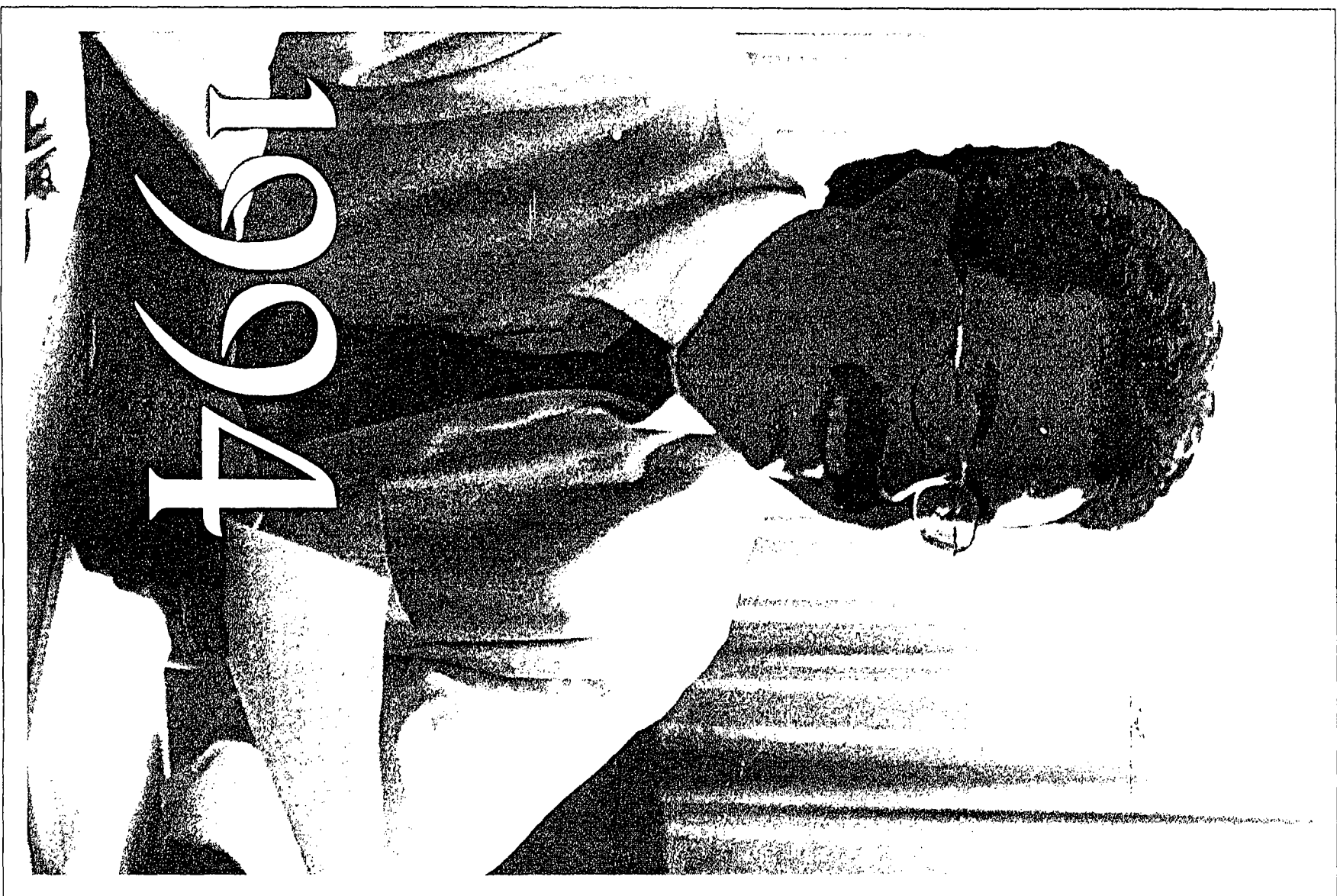




Maternal, Child Health, and Nutrition Unit. During the year, the Council was the recipient of a Bonding Grant from the Connecticut Department of Social Services to complete renovations of the Jovenes Youth Training Center within the Council offices. The Council also received a Community Development Block Grant from the City of Hartford to help decorate and furnish the new youth center. Additionally, the Council in collaboration with the Institute for Community Research, received a grant from the National Institute on Drug Abuse to study the role of violence in drug use and AIDS risk in the Puerto Rican community.

- In 1997, the combined efforts of the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health of Yale University, the Hispanic Health Council, and the Institute for Community Research resulted in the creation of the Yale Center for Interdisciplinary Research on AIDS (CIRA), with the awarding of a program project grant by the National Institute on Mental Health and the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Through CIRA, the Council began work on two new studies designed to assess approaches for HIV prevention among illicit drug users. In 1997, the Hispanic Health Council participated in the Hartford Health Survey designed to assess the health needs of Hartford residents. This work grew out of Rolando Martinez's service on the Hartford Mayor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on Health and led to the formation of the citywide Community Health Partnership focusing on diabetes, asthma, hypertension and other chronic diseases.
- In 1998, the City of Hartford awarded the Council an administrative contract for the Maternal Infant Outreach Program (MIOP), an effort that collaborates with the Council's long-standing Comadrona Program in providing community outreach and support to pregnant women and girls in need of prenatal care. During the year, the Board of Directors of the Council created the Hispanic Health Council Foundation to oversee Council properties and to conduct initiatives to financially support the work of the Council. In 1998, the Council and the Institute for Community Research initiated the AIDS Research Consortium (ARC) to coordinate our existing collaborative AIDS research projects and to undertake new initiatives designed to understand and address HIV prevention and intervention needs in Hartford. This year marked the beginning of the Council's involvement, under the direction of longtime Council employee Maria Serrano, in the National Safe Kids Campaign. Within one year, the





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Council had provided car seats and child safety education to 150 families with newborn children through this program.

- In 1999, the Council launched the Institute for Development, Evaluation and Administrative Services (IDEAS), a program designed to contract with other organizations for the provision of in-service staff trainings, management services, evaluations and needs assessments, and small research projects. During the year, the Council received contracts from New York University's Mount Sinai Medical School, Washington University Medical School, the Hartford Dispensary, and Guakia to provide research, evaluation, and management services through the IDEAS program. In partnership with the Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, Yale University School of Medicine, the University of Massachusetts School of Public Health, and several community-based organizations, the Council was awarded a grant by the National Institute on Drug Abuse to assess access to sterile syringes among illicit drug users in Hartford, New Haven and Springfield, MA. Additionally, research development grants were awarded by CIRA to two of the Council's newer researchers, while the Office of AIDS Research, National Institutes of Health, awarded sizable supplements to four of the ongoing studies in the Research Department. The Council also started to formally provide outreach and referral as well as clinical services to migrant and seasonal farm workers in collaboration with the CT River Valley Health Network, and Hartford Hospital. Also during the year, Hartford Hospital, in collaboration with the Council, opened *Companeros en Salud*, a community-focused primary health care medical practice at the Council's Main St. offices. A highlight of 1999 was the Hispanic Health Council's 20th Anniversary Celebration and Awards Presentation organized by the Board of Directors of the Hispanic Health Council.

