

BusinessNewsday > Long Island > Suffolk

Help offered to Hispanic entrepreneurs

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Maria Cuebas has yearned to open a spa since she arrived here from Puerto Rico more than 20 years ago.

The Brentwood resident studied relaxation therapies and beauty techniques, but her goal of launching a small business eluded her -- until recently.

Cuebas got free advice on writing a business plan, preparing a budget and marketing her services through The Hispanic Initiative, a new federally funded program of the Small Business Development Center at Stony Brook University

Saturday, she intends to unveil **Marosé Spa and Wellness**, a mobile service bringing rejuvenation to people in hotels, hair salons and homes.

"It's been a dream that I had for years," said Cuebas, 44. "I started thinking how nice it would be if I could come home from work and have someone do everything for me: the facial, the pedicure, the manicure . . . Then I thought I could do that for others."

The program started in July and seeks to fill a void in the region's business community.

The initiative, modeled after similar services across the country, stems from the rapid growth of [Long Island](#)'s Latino population over the past two decades. Latinos are also starting small businesses at a high rate.

Nationally, the number of Hispanic-owned businesses jumped by 44 percent between 2002 and 2007 to 2.3 million, according to census figures. In the same period, Hispanic businesses on [Long Island](#) increased by 31 percent in [Nassau](#) and 60 percent in [Suffolk](#), to more than 23,000 combined.

The local initiative aims to fuel that expansion by providing support services -- in English and Spanish - - to budding entrepreneurs.

The program was started with about \$70,000 in federal grants, and organizers are now seeking additional funds from corporations. The towns of [Brookhaven](#) and [Islip](#), and the [Suffolk](#) County Office of Minority Affairs, are helping promote the program. The [Patchogue](#)-Medford Public Library has signed on to provide additional bilingual business resources in that area.

More than 30 small businesses have already taken advantage of the free advice, including help with crucial cash-flow analyses, marketing strategies and feasibility studies, said Jesus Alejandro Riano, the initiative coordinator.

"Many people have realized the importance of providing assistance so those Hispanic-owned businesses can do a better job, because the impact will be positive for the state and the municipalities here," Riano said. "It makes sense."