

Houston Hispanic Chamber seeing membership soar

■ Officials urge participants to network more in a recession

By **JENALIA MORENO**
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Mango paletas, locally brewed coffee and lots of business advice were doled out at the Houston Hispanic Chamber of Commerce's annual luncheon.

Some 1,450 people packed into the sold-out event Thursday in the downtown Hilton of the Americas ballroom.

The chamber's membership has soared to more than 3,000 from more than 500 in 2006 and it is now the largest Hispanic chamber in Texas.

Membership has increased not only because of the growth of the city's Hispanic business community but also because of an aggressive 10-year strategic plan.

Since January, attendance at the chamber's events has grown, said Hispanic Cham-

ber President and Chief Executive Officer Laura Murillo.

She took over in 2007, and since then the chamber has offered its members more services and training. The chamber has also relocated from the East End to downtown.

"It is indeed in these economic times when the importance of participating in business development groups, like the Houston Hispanic Chamber, is even more critical to the growth of your enterprise," said George González, the chamber's chairman.

Members agreed that they need to network even more during a recession.

"You can't let your guard down. You just don't know what's going to happen if the economy goes down in Houston," said Juan Aguilar, president of Tanko International, who joined the chamber four years ago. His company, a distributor of polyethylene storage tanks, was participating in the chamber's expo.

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