

Hola offers voice for York Region's Hispanic and Latino communities



By Brock Weir

Obstacles ? it is the common thread that binds the immigrant experience whether you are just planting your own roots in Canada or researching the experiences of your pioneer ancestors.

But, out of every obstacle comes amazing stories of perseverance and success, and it is those stories within York Region's Hispanic and Latino communities that Aurora entrepreneurs are seeking to share.

2017 will mark the first anniversary of *Hola* York Region, a new bilingual magazine founded by the husband-and-wife team of Chole Vargas and Cindy Shaver.

Mr. Vargas, a financial advisor and clothing designer by trade, and Colombian native, along with Ms. Shaver, a writer and photographer with a publishing background, have pooled their passions for the magazine, seizing what they describe as a "moment" for the growing Hispanic and Latino communities in the area.

"We are just in the right moment in York Region because it keeps growing," says Mr. Vargas.

Adds Ms. Shaver: "We saw an opportunity and questioned whether we wanted to go down this road right now. Obviously everyone has lots on their plate and we never know if it is the right time, but we thought if we don't act now this moment will pass and someone else might do it. Maybe not in the exact way we could do it, but we thought we had the experience, we have got the passion, so why not?"

The result is a glossy magazine available free of charge across York Region, including the Aurora Public Library, featuring stories about and relevant to both communities, published in English and Spanish, and illustrated with exclusive photos from Aurora's Dukat Studios, another husband-and-wife venture, run by Angela Durante Dukat and Laszlo Dukat.

"We started with knowing what we didn't want it to be," says Ms. Shaver. "We didn't want it to be about gossip and sad news, or beyond York Region. We might feature something that has an impact on our community, yet they are not local people, but we wanted it to feel inclusive and centred here."

Adds Chole: "There are so many good stories. Everyone has a good story that nobody knows and has good stuff to share. They can share their experiences and their lives. It is not easy to survive in Canada if you are coming from another country. There are so many obstacles. Language is one of them, the culture, your family, your customs, the people, and everything you're used to in your country, and you have to start almost from zero. There are amazing stories of people who start from the bottom and are coming along."

But, it is not something catered solely to the Hispanic and Latino communities, Ms. Shaver and Mr. Vargas agree that the idea is to inspire people across the board and, perhaps, change some perceptions along the way. There are some "stigmas" that have plagued the Latin American and Hispanic cultures that are hold-overs from the 1980s, says Mr. Vargas, but the problems of that era have long passed.

"A lot of people still make comments about the cocaine," says Mr. Vargas of his own experience as a Colombian. "But that was a long time ago and there are so many good things. Some people have a perception that it is another world. We really want to unite the

two cultures, to promote each other and each other's businesses. It is really hard, especially for entrepreneurs, and I think this is another way we can support each other, which is very important for us as a community.

?Working as a team with Cindy has been really fun. We really enjoy working together.?

For more on Hola York Region, visit www.holayorkregion.com.