

BUSINESS

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Dominican delegation networks in Trenton

By ANITA T. SHAFFER
and CRISSA SHOEMAKER
Staff Writers

TRENTON — The greetings were in Spanish and so was much of the conversation.

But it was the language of international commerce that was really being spoken yesterday as a group of political leaders from the Dominican Republic toured Trenton as part of an economic development mission.

The delegation from the Caribbean nation visited several city businesses and toured public facilities as part of the networking trip.

It was all a bid to establish ties between the city's growing Hispanic community and a country that is in need of modernization, particularly in the wake of Hurricane Georges' rampage through the region in September.

Hipolito Mejia, vice president of the Dominican Revolutionary Party and a contender for his nation's presidency in 2000, said through an interpreter that he was "trying to get new ideas" and was seeking to establish friendships abroad in visiting Trenton.

He said he had "heard great things were happening in the county of Mercer."

Indeed, the city and the county put their best foot forward to welcome the delegation, which included several

senators and congressmen.

County Executive Robert D. Prunetti presented Mejia with a Trenton Thunder baseball cap, baseball and T-shirt and a T-shirt from the new sports arena under construction off Route 129.

Mejia in turn presented him with a box of cigars.

"The purpose of this was to establish a relationship and a friendship," Prunetti said during a luncheon at Malaga Restaurant in Hamilton. "We have a growing Latino population in our county, particularly Dominicans. The skills and knowledge and labor force that's brought to us is very important."

The talents of the city's Hispanic business community were on display when the Dominicans visited the offices of Frank X. Moya Architects, a Trenton firm that specializes in urban design.

Moya's work includes designing the jazz restaurant Maxine's and helping with the \$20 million development in the Battle Monument neighborhood.

The architect, a Princeton University graduate who grew up in Puerto Rico, told the visitors in Spanish of a current project he is designing to rebuild a section of Caguas in Puerto Rico.

The homes will be steel-frame construction with one "safe room" that can withstand the force of hurricane

• see MISSION, D2



Staff photo by Mark Sherman

Looking over plans for a rebuilding project in Puerto Rico are, from left, city Detective Pedro Medina; County Executive Robert Prunetti; Hipolito Mejia, vice president of the Dominican Revolutionary Party; and architect Frank Moya.

Mission

• continued from D1

winds, Moya said.

Other stops on the tour included the Italian Peoples Bakery, the sports arena construction site, the State House, the county courthouse and Waterfront Park.

The visit came about as a result of the efforts by the Puerto Rican Parade committee in Trenton to raise funds for hurricane victims. The local committee raised \$20,000, which was split between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, according to Juan Martinez, a Trenton businessman who coordinated the fund raising.

Martinez, president of 4 Corners Promotions Inc., said the trip grew out of contacts between local residents and Dominicans over the hurricane.

Pedro Medina, a city detective active in community affairs, delighted in the concept of Hispanics from different ethnic backgrounds working together. "The world is getting smaller and smaller, and we all must work together to make life better for everyone in this world," said Medina, who accompanied the group. "This is very exciting and meaningful for us as Hispanics."