

# GLOBAL ATLANTA SnapSHOTS

A LOOK AT ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN THE ATLANTA REGION



## MEXICANS

The Global Atlanta Snapshots were created to foster understanding among all people of the Atlanta region. The Snapshots show the rich ethnic and cultural diversity that our region now enjoys. The residents of Atlanta's ethnic communities may have lived in the region for a long time or may have recently arrived. They may come from cultures and have customs significantly different from each other's, and from those of the general population of the Atlanta region. What they have in common with the rest of the region is that they make it their home, and they share in and contribute to its success. The Snapshots introduce and portray selected communities in terms of their backgrounds, their customs and cultures, their roles in the regional economy, and specific local resources available throughout the region.

### Mexicans in the Atlanta Economy



One of the great magnets drawing Mexicans to metropolitan Atlanta was the region's development boom during the 1980s and 1990s. Accelerated by the selection of Atlanta to host the 1996 summer Olympic Games, the large expansion in construction activity drew many Mexican workers to the area. This is still evident in the workforce data for 2000. First, it should be noted, Atlanta's Mexican workers are predominantly male. Of some 77,100 workers in the region, 60,650 or 79 percent are men. Of those men, more than half – 30,600 – are employed in construction occupations. The largest grouping is that of construction workers (9,100). Other large concentrations include carpenters, painters and paperhangers, construction specialty trades and construction supervisors.

Outside of the construction occupations, Mexican men now account for 2,300 positions in management, business and financial occupations. An increasing number are operating their own businesses, as professionals and owners of restaurants and other retail establishments. Others are concentrated in food preparation, building and grounds maintenance, a variety of sales and office occupations, as well as production and materials handling jobs.

Mexican women, while having a smaller role in the Atlanta economy and being less concentrated in their occupations, contribute to the local economy in their roles in food preparation and serving, building and grounds work and in production jobs. Their prominence in carpet production is reflected in the number (nearly 700) in textile and apparel jobs. Almost 2,200 Mexican women hold management and professional jobs, including about 450 as teachers and librarians.

Because of language barriers and, for some, an uncertain immigration status, life in Atlanta presents many challenges for Mexicans. For undocumented immigrants, access to a driver's license is denied, limiting the range of employment opportunities. Consular ID cards, the Mexican Matricula, are now being accepted as valid identification by the City of Atlanta, DeKalb County and several banks for the provision of services and financial transactions. Immigrants recognize that mastery of the English language will be necessary for their advancement. However, access to language classes is uneven and finding the time and money, along with the fact that some may not even have Spanish literacy, remain as obstacles. Anti-immigrant sentiments, heightened by concerns related to the war on terrorism and the sluggish economic climate in the early years of this decade, have added to the challenges faced by newer immigrants.

Nevertheless, the Mexican community has been overcoming these challenges. With their growing numbers, Mexicans and the larger Latino community have been asserting their political strength. In 2004, three Latinos were serving in the Georgia State Legislature; another was an elected DeKalb County Court Judge.

### Where is the Mexican Community?

There is a growing presence of Mexican-Americans throughout the 10-county Atlanta region. But concentrations along the Buford Highway and I-85 corridor, first noted in the 1990 census, have expanded and now extend well into Gwinnett County.

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## A PERSONAL STORY

The election of Sam Zamarripa to the Georgia State Senate in 2002 gave tangible proof of the growing political strength of the Atlanta Hispanic community. The son of a Mexican father and an Irish-American mother, Sen. Zamarripa is the first Hispanic senator and one of three Hispanics now serving in the state legislature. Protecting rights for undocumented immigrants became one of the priorities of the senator's first legislative session. He is also well known for his work in regional transportation and economic development.

Zamarripa has taken a difficult path in his own education, leaving school at age fourteen to work full time and attend school part time. Eventually, he completed his high school education in 1970 and joined a private group similar to the Peace Corps in Appalachia. In 1975, Mr. Zamarripa earned his undergraduate degree at New College in Sarasota, Florida. He went on to graduate school at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and received his Master's Degree in Public Administration.

Today, Sam Zamarripa is a Partner at Heritage Capital Advisors, which provides investment banking services with offices in Atlanta and Memphis. He is also Co-Founder and Director of United Americas Bank, N.A., where he serves as chairman of the marketing committee. He is also a director of Assurance America Corporation and Diaz Foods Incorporated.

In addition to these and other business activities, Mr. Zamarripa is involved in a number of volunteer and civic leadership roles. He serves as an advisory board member of The Atlanta Medical Center. Other board memberships include the Atlanta College of Art, the National Black Arts Festival and WPBA TV, Atlanta Public Television. The senator is also active with the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund and serves on the Foundation Board of Atlanta Technical College.

Sam Zamarripa lives with his wife and their twin daughters in the Inman Park community. In addition to renovating their own home, the Zamarripas are actively joining their neighbors in the revival of the historic neighborhood.

### Languages Spoken

Spanish is the language of Mexico, although there are a number of indigenous languages that are also widely used. Most Mexicans come to Atlanta speaking at least a little English. For those who are not fluent, learning English is a high priority.

**“¿Cómo está?”** (*co-moh es-tah*)  
How are you?

**“¿Qué pasa?”** (*kay pah-sah*)  
What's happening?

**“¿Habla usted inglés?”** (*ah-blah oo-sted een-glase*)  
Do you speak English?

## Who are the Mexican-Americans?

The decade of the 1990s was marked by the phenomenal growth of Atlanta's Mexican community. Some 113,000 Mexicans called the 10-county Atlanta region home at the time of the 2000 census.

Mexico, our neighbor on America's southern border, is today a nation of over 97 million inhabitants (2000 national census). Its people have been migrating northward in significant numbers over many decades. As a country with extremes of wealth and poverty, most of the migrants have come to seek new economic opportunities in the United States. Traditionally, the newcomers settled in California and the southwestern border states of Texas, New Mexico and Arizona. Only in the last 10 to 20 years have Mexicans come to settle in new “gateway” communities farther from the international border. Atlanta is a principal example of such a new gateway, along with such other non-southwestern metropolitan areas as Charlotte, Raleigh-Durham and Washington, DC.

The Mexican people have a rich history and complex cultural heritage. For centuries before European explorers and conquerors

reached the land we now know as Mexico, indigenous people had developed highly sophisticated civilizations. The native Indian populations, including the Maya and the Toltec peoples, had built great cities, produced a calendar and both counting and writing systems. In 1521, the last great Indian empire, that of the Aztecs, was conquered by Spanish invaders. For the next 300 years, Mexico was ruled as a Spanish colony. Today, the great majority of Mexicans are *mestizos*, descendants of the colonial rulers and indigenous population, with mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry. While the population includes some people of unmixed Spanish or Indian ancestry, for most Mexicans being a *mestizo* is a matter of national pride.

Mexico's official language is Spanish, spoken by over 93 percent of the population. However, some 6 million Mexicans over the age of 5 were recorded as speaking indigenous languages. Of these, Nahuatl, Maya, Zapotec, Otomi and Mixtec, used mostly in rural regions to the south, are the most important language groups. Occasionally, these ancient languages will be encountered even today in Atlanta.



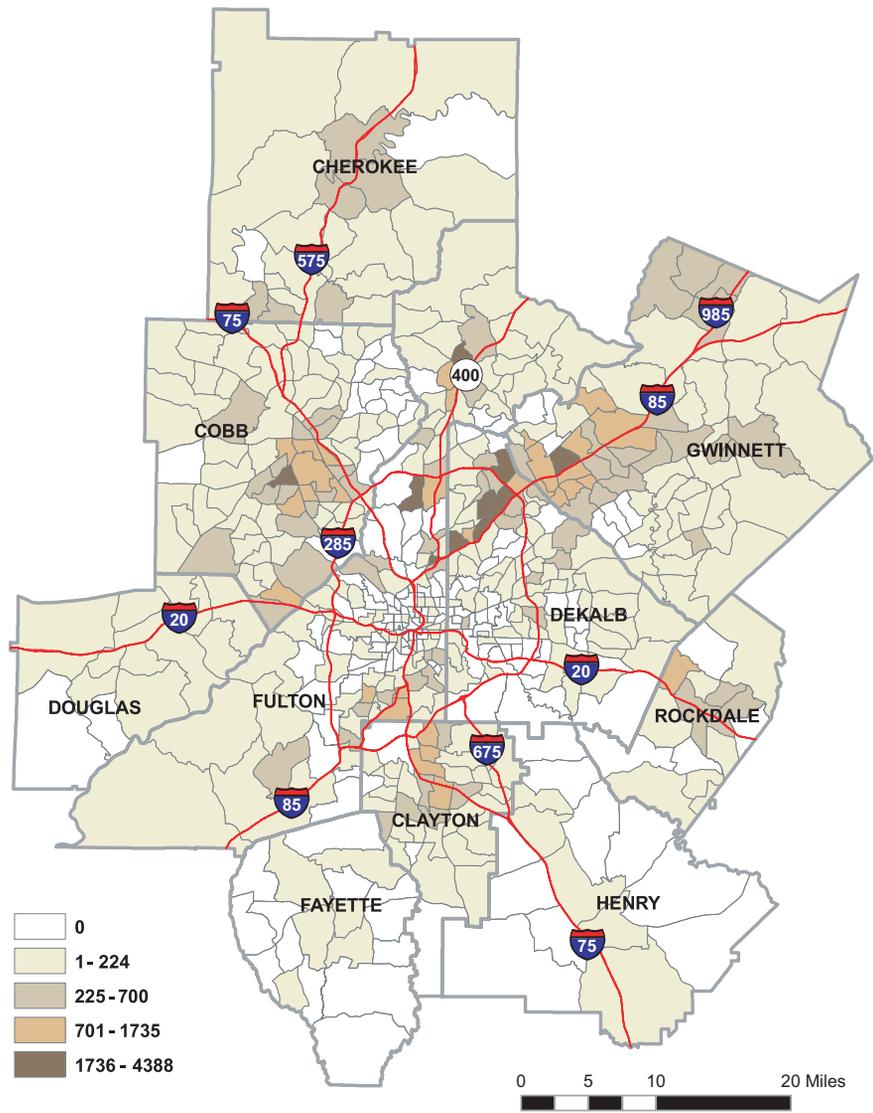
# Mexicans in the Atlanta Region: By the Numbers

- Cherokee: 3,424
- Clayton: 8,974
- Cobb: 21,492
- DeKalb: 24,054
- Douglas: 824
- Fayette: 237
- Fulton: 24,219
- Gwinnett: 26,682
- Henry: 295
- Rockdale: 2,724

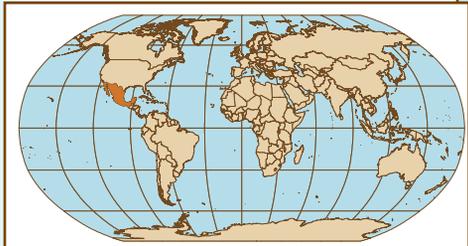
**Total 10-county Region: 112,925**

- **Gwinnett County** has the most persons born in Mexico in the region, numbering 26,682 as of the 2000 Census. Of Gwinnett's 99,518 foreign-born population, **27 percent** hail from Mexico.
- Approximately **42 percent** of Georgia's total population lives in the 10-county, but **59 percent** of the state's Mexican population lives in the region.
- **Gwinnett by itself** is home to **14 percent** of the state's population born in Mexico.
- The Atlanta region is home to a total of **195,934 persons born in Latin America**, which according to Census calculations, includes the Caribbean, Central and South America.
- Of the region's **401,620 foreign-born population**, **28 percent** hails from Mexico and **49 percent** hail from Latin America in general.
- The **heaviest concentrations** of Mexicans in the region can be found **along the interstates**.

# MEXICAN-BORN POPULATION IN ATLANTA Atlanta Region, 2000



Source: 2000 Census Data on Foreign-Born Population by Region, Country or Area of Birth



Tenochtitlán-ancient ruins of the Aztec Empire

# What are Mexican Customs and Culture?

The Mexican community places a strong emphasis on family, not only for emotional support and companionship, but for business and professional contacts too. Saturday soccer matches are attended by entire families, and sons of physicians and waiters join to honor their homeland through sport. When the game is over, they celebrate their culture by dining on traditional Mexican food.

Another strong value is the belief in education. Many Mexican-Americans, especially those from rural backgrounds, were not able to access a good education. As a result, it is important to them that their children take advantage of every educational opportunity. It is not uncommon for schools of medicine and law to have Mexican-American students whose parents were migrant workers. These children feel a strong commitment to helping their parents and siblings once they have graduated and become established in their professions.

The most basic cultural treasure shared by Latinos is *la familia* (the family). From the time children learn how to walk they are taught to revere and respect *la familia*. Latinos' natural support system

ONE OF THE GREAT MAGNETS DRAWING MEXICANS TO METROPOLITAN ATLANTA WAS THE REGION'S DEVELOPMENT BOOM OF THE 1980S AND 1990S.

includes the immediate family, the extended family and the Church. In times of crisis, *la familia* is the primary social support and important decisions often include their advice.

Most Mexican-Americans are open and warm and consider friendship very important. A Mexican household is a gregarious place filled with family and friends. The concept of being alone or "doing your own thing" is foreign to them. They generally view life with humor and irony and can always find a reason to have a party to enjoy traditional and popular music, with a lot of people, food and noise.

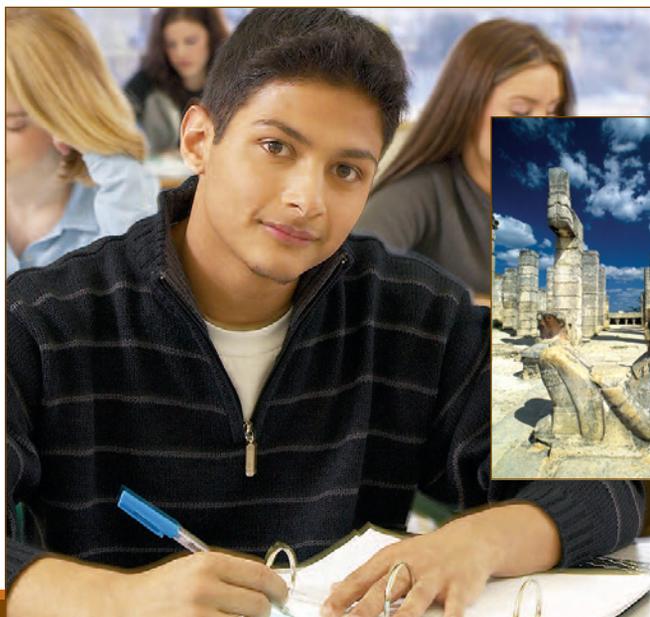
At the dinner table, everyone may be talking at once, with the same intensity and volume. Respect for the individual, especially the elderly, is valued, and older people are rarely addressed by their first name. Their opinions are respected and provide guidance for the family.

Among Mexicans from indigenous and rural backgrounds, eye contact is considered disrespectful. Mexicans tend to stand closer to each other during conversations than do Americans and arm gestures are a normal part of conversation. Open hand gestures, however, may have unwanted connotations. Shaking hands is important. At the termination of any encounter with a group of Mexicans, one should shake every individual's hand, both males and females. Pointing at an individual (especially with a finger) is considered offensive.

Major public holidays, Cinco de Mayo (May 5th) and Mexican Independence Day (September 16th) are happy occasions celebrated with dancing, eating and music. Many local restaurants have typically become involved with the Cinco de Mayo festivities. The Mexican Consulate and Friends of Mexico have sponsored large celebrations in Grant Park to mark Mexican Independence Day. The party, to which all are invited, includes dancing, contests for the children and an impressive display of locally available Mexican cuisine.

The Day of the Dead, when deceased relatives are remembered, is a major cultural observance which includes elaborate foods and rituals. The Cultural Center of Mexico, located on Peachtree Road, has held public observances of the day, open to all who are interested. Another holiday is Three Kings' Day, celebrated by a party at a local art gallery early each January. It includes Mexican art, music and piñatas for the children.

Most Mexicans are Catholic. There are many Spanish-language Masses held in various parts of the Atlanta region, and many local churches sponsor Hispanic congregations and even special Hispanic services.



## Celebrated Holidays

In addition to other Western holidays, the Mexicans may celebrate the following:

**Three Kings' Day**  
January

**Hispanic Heritage Month**  
Sept. - Oct.

**Easter and Holy Week**  
Mar./ Apr.

**All Saints Day**  
Nov. 1

**Cinco de Mayo**  
May 5

**Day of the Dead  
(All Souls' Day)**  
Nov. 2

**St. John the Baptist Day**  
June 24

**Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe**  
Dec. 12

**Mexican Independence Day**  
Sept. 16

## Traditional Mexican Names

Non-Latinos often have difficulty sorting out traditional Mexican and Mexican-American names. In Mexico, individuals have two last names. Examples of names for a husband and wife are:

**Jose Rojas Flores**

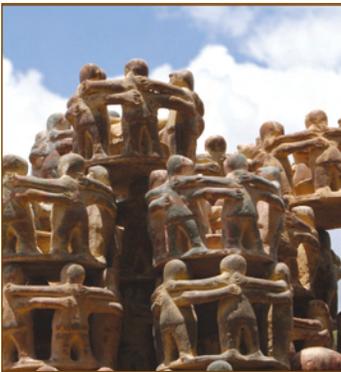
**Sarah Cabrera Fernandez**

Jose considers “Rojas” his primary last name and Flores his secondary last name. Sarah did not change her name when she married Jose. Because “Fernandez” is her secondary last name she might give her name as “Sarah Cabrera F.”

Jose’s and Sarah’s son will take his primary last name from Jose and his secondary last name from Sarah:

**Pedro Rojas Cabrera**

It is important to remember the significance of the primary last name and not treat it as a middle name.



## Hispanic or Latino?

It is difficult to make assumptions about Latinos or Hispanics since they represent a mix of racial and ethnic populations from 22 different countries of origin.

Not all Latinos speak Spanish, and the diversity of origins in many countries makes for a variety of visible features such as shades of skin color. The specific populations designated under these terms have unique demographic characteristics and degrees of acculturation, in addition to differences in history and cultural backgrounds.

The terms Hispanic or Latino, used by many to attempt to designate these diverse populations under one category, continue to be a source of contention. Using “Hispanic” implies a connection to ancient Spain and its language, while “Latino” refers to the various nationalities (including the non-Spanish speaking ones) in Latin America. For example, Brazilians speak Portuguese and can be considered Latinos but not Hispanics.

First used in the 1980 US Census, the category term of Hispanic caused uproar among Latinos in the Southwest, Chicago and New York but was accepted in Texas, and Florida. Originally the term Latino was considered but then rejected because it sounded too close to Ladino, the ancient language of the Spanish Jews who exiled in the 15th century. Interestingly enough, Filipinos were colonized by Spain and speak Spanish, yet the US Census categorizes them as Asian Americans.

Throughout the decades, several terms were used

such as “Spanish speaking”, “Latin American”, “Hispanic”, but today, with the influx of Latino superstars and superheros; the most popular term is Latino, because it reflects the growing population who have migrated from Latin America.

There are various reasons Latinos prefer this term over Hispanic but if given a choice, many would still choose their country of origin, such as Puerto Rican, Mexican, Colombian, Brazilian etc.; or even emphasize their subsequent US origin with NewYorican.

It is said that those who prefer the term Hispanic are usually middle class, and educated in the United States. Linguistically, the term Latino has gender, following the Spanish rules (Latina in the feminine), while the term Hispanic follows the English rules.

For some, including the term Latino in the denomination is a way also of honoring the culture and contributions of the native people in Latin America. Hispanics who have resided in New Mexico, Texas and Florida for generations (since the Spanish settlers) should also be included in the denomination, because they too experience specific barriers. In Georgia, the majority of new residents are Latinos, who immigrated from Latin America and experience specific challenges with acculturation. To be politically correct, it is best to use both terms, i.e. Latino-Hispanic, interchangeably. As of January 2003, all federal programs must use both terms, according to the Office of Management and Budget.

– Courtesy of Venus Gines, of Dia de la Mujer Latina, Inc., Atlanta

# Mexican Organizations, Associations and Resources

Below is a listing of selected organizations who work with the Mexican Community. Additional resources are available at [www.atlantaregional.com](http://www.atlantaregional.com)

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**Catholic Social Services** (*Servicio Social Católico*)  
680 West Peachtree, Atlanta, GA 30308  
(404) 881-6571  
Hispanic Hotline (404) 888-7841  
(Contact main office for services and outreach center locations.)  
[www.cssatlanta.com](http://www.cssatlanta.com)

**Consulate of Mexico**  
2600 Apple Valley Rd. NE, Atlanta, GA 30319  
(404) 266-2233  
[www.consulmexatlanta.org](http://www.consulmexatlanta.org)

**Hispanic Yellow Pages**  
(*Páginas Amarillas Hispanas*)  
Casablanca Publishing, Inc.  
P.O. Box 191033, Atlanta, GA 31119  
(404) 844-0600  
[www.paginasamarillas-atl.com](http://www.paginasamarillas-atl.com)

**National Image, Inc.**  
(employment, education, civil rights for all Hispanics)  
P. O. Box 1512, Atlanta, GA 30301  
Sylvia Sanchez, President  
(404)266-1956

**Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund** (*Defensa Legal y Fondo Educativo Mexico Americano*)  
41 Marietta St. Suite #1000, Atlanta, GA 30303  
(678) 559-1071  
[www.maldef.org](http://www.maldef.org)

**Our Lady of The Americas Catholic Mission**  
(*Misión Católica Nuestra Señora de las Américas*)  
5918 New Peachtree Road, Doraville, GA 30340  
(770) 454-8437

## ASSOCIATIONS

**Latin American Association (LAA)**  
(*Asociación Latinoamericana*)  
[www.latinamericanassoc.org](http://www.latinamericanassoc.org)

LAA - DeKalb County (Main office)  
2750 Buford Highway, Atlanta, GA  
30324  
(404) 638-1800

LAA - Gwinnett Outreach Center  
Harmony Station Outreach Center  
Harmony Station Apartments  
1250 Old Norcross Tucker Rd.  
Tucker, GA 30084  
(678) 205-1018

LAA - Cobb County Outreach Center  
Hickory Lake Outreach Center  
Hickory Lake Apartments  
490 Windy Hill Road, Smyrna, GA  
(678) 213-0500

**Las Colinas Outreach Center**  
Las Colinas Apartments  
861 Franklin Road, Marietta, GA  
(678) 213-0360

**Coalition for New Georgia** (*political/legislative issues*)  
Business Address:  
1100 Peachtree Street, Suite 2800  
Atlanta, GA 30309  
Mailing Address:  
P.O. Box 29506, Atlanta, GA 30359  
(404) 745-2580  
e-mail: [jerry@galeo.org](mailto:jerry@galeo.org)  
<http://www.galeo.org>

## BUSINESS

**Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce**  
(*La Cámara de Comercio Hispana de Georgia*)  
2801 Buford Hwy., Suite 500  
Atlanta, GA 30329  
(404) 929-9998  
[www.ghcc.org](http://www.ghcc.org)

**Mexican-American Business Chamber of Atlanta** (*Cámara de Comercio Mexico Americano de Atlanta*)  
5522 New Peachtree Rd., Suite 129  
Chamblee, GA 30341  
(770) 441-7581  
[www.mexicanchamber.org](http://www.mexicanchamber.org)

**Mexican Trade Commission**  
233 Peachtree Street, Suite 2205  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
(404) 522-5373  
[www.bancomext.com](http://www.bancomext.com)

## HEALTH

**Día de la Mujer Latina, Inc.**  
5755 Lawrenceville Hwy  
Tucker, GA 30084-1919  
(770) 717-0021  
Toll-Free: 1-866-54-MUJER  
e-mail: [venus2004@diadelamujerlatina.org](mailto:venus2004@diadelamujerlatina.org)  
[www.diadelamujerlatina.org](http://www.diadelamujerlatina.org)

**Centro Médico Latinoamericano**  
2841 Buford Hwy., Atlanta, GA 30329  
(404) 321-5151

**Clinic for Education, Treatment and Prevention of Addiction (CETPA)**  
(*Clínica de Educación, Tratamiento y Prevención de la Adicción*)  
e-mail: [cetpa@cetpa.org](mailto:cetpa@cetpa.org)  
[www.cetpa.org](http://www.cetpa.org)  
Corporate address:  
7740 Roswell Rd., Suite 700, Atlanta, GA 30350  
(770) 452-8630

CETPA Gwinnett  
Watkins Office Park  
660 McDonough Dr., Suite N  
Norcross, GA 30093  
(678) 282-0307

**Clínica de la Mamá**  
4140 Jonesboro Road, Forest Park, GA 30297  
5127 Jimmy Carter Blvd., Norcross, GA 30093  
(770) 613-0070

**Clínica de la Salud Hispana**  
3652 Chamblee-Dunwoody Rd., Suite 4  
Atlanta, GA 30341  
(770) 451-0662  
969 Windy Hill Rd., Suite E, Smyrna, GA 30080  
(678) 888-0173  
[www.clinicadelasaludhispana.com](http://www.clinicadelasaludhispana.com)

**Clínica de Urgencias Los Remedios**  
(*Emergency Clinic Los Remedios*)  
275 Carpenter Dr., Suite 100, Atlanta, GA 30328  
(404) 497-9739

**Good Samaritan Health Center**  
(*Centro de Salud El Buen Samaritano*)  
239 Alexander Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30313  
(404) 523-6571

**St. Joseph's Mercy Clinics** (main office)  
424 Decatur Street, Atlanta, GA 30312  
(404)880-3550  
Northeast Plaza  
3367 Buford Hwy., Atlanta, GA 30329  
(404) 880-3711

## MEDIA

**Atlanta Latino, Inc.**  
6400 Atlantic Blvd., Suite 200  
Norcross, GA 30371  
(770) 416-7570  
[www.atlantalatino.com](http://www.atlantalatino.com)

**1550 AM Radio La Que Buena**  
1800 Lake Park Drive, Suite 99  
Smyrna, GA 30080  
(770) 436-6171  
[www.radiolaquebuena.com](http://www.radiolaquebuena.com)

**La Visión** (*Weekly newspaper*)  
2200 Norcross Pkwy, Suite 210  
Norcross, GA 30071  
(770) 963-7521  
[www.lavisiononline.com](http://www.lavisiononline.com)

**Mundo Hispánico**  
P.O. Box 13808, Atlanta, GA 30324  
(404) 881-1484  
[www.mundohispanico.com](http://www.mundohispanico.com)

**Telemundo Network**  
2470 West 8th Avenue, Hialeah, FL 33010  
[www.telemundo.com](http://www.telemundo.com)

**Univisión 34 Atlanta** (*Spanish Cable TV*)  
3350 Peachtree Road, Atlanta, GA 30326  
(404) 926-2300

**WAOS-1600 AM La Favorita**  
(Reaches Cobb, Clayton, Douglas, Fulton, Fayette, DeKalb and Paulding counties)  
5815 Westside Rd., Austell, GA 30106  
(770) 944-0900  
[www.radiolafavorita.com](http://www.radiolafavorita.com)

**WPBS-1040 AM Planeta X** (*Spanish talk radio*)  
5750 Brook Hollow Parkway, Suite 101,  
Norcross, GA 30071  
(770) 483-1000  
[www.radioplanetax.com](http://www.radioplanetax.com)

**Contact:**  
E-mail: [globalsnapshots@atlantaregional.com](mailto:globalsnapshots@atlantaregional.com)

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Charles Krautler, Executive Director

Darlene Daly, Project Coordinator

The Atlanta Regional Commission is the official planning agency for the ten-county Atlanta region including Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, and Rockdale, as well as the City of Atlanta and 63 other cities. ARC provides a forum where leaders come together to discuss and act on issues of regionwide consequence.

The Community Foundation • 50 Hurt Plaza, Suite 449, Atlanta, Georgia 30303 • 404.688.5525 • [www.atlcf.org](http://www.atlcf.org)

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