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## Balancing Act: Politics and Family

Raul Danny Vargas juggles running a business and working on political, local Hispanic advisory committees with being a father of two.

By Brynn Grimley

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Raul Danny Vargas could say his life has every "success story" cliché. He knows first-hand the perseverance it takes to "pick oneself up from the bootstraps," to come from rags to riches, to make something out of nothing. And, like other clichés, he has "never forgotten where he came from." But, unlike those who have become successful and moved on, Vargas has made it a point to give back to the community. More specifically, he has worked to act as a positive role model to Hispanic youths in the area, showing them no matter how poor or disadvantaged they are, they too can be successful.

"The key thing," said Vargas about his participation on various Hispanic advisory committees, "is participation for kids, to point them where they can see that no matter what happens, they can always overcome disadvantages."

THE YOUNGEST of four children, the Brooklyn, N.Y. native says he does not have an uncommon story for the area he grew up in. As natives of Puerto Rico, Vargas' parents moved to the United States in the 1950s. When the children were little, his parents got divorced and his mother was left to provide for the family. Because she had a first grade education, knew little English, was illiterate and had dealt with years of abuse, Vargas said his mother was ill prepared to raise a family on her own. The family went on welfare and began moving from place to place because they could not afford rent or utility bills. His mother also began to drink because she did not know how to cope. Soon his older sisters found alternate housing, one moved into a group home while the other moved in with friends. The third began hanging out with the wrong people. This left Vargas, who was around 10 years old at the time, home alone and neglected.

Vargas remembers days of being hungry and not being able to fend for himself. He often ate ice cubes with salt as meals and would fall asleep due to the exhaustion of crying all day.

"You get to a point where these things pass and you grow up and move on," he said looking back. "It gave me the tenacity and perseverance to go on."

After a favored high school teacher took Vargas to Boston and Washington, D.C. to see the Library of Congress, he realized there was more to life than hardships.

"My escape, my way of getting out was the military," said the businessman from the formal living room of his Herndon home.

"I had wanted to do it anyway, because I had always been patriotic, but at 17 [years old] I convinced my mom to sign the forms."

While serving in the United States Air Force, Vargas pursued a career in intelligence while traveling around the world.

During this time Vargas met his wife of 15 years.

"We were at a Christmas party in New York and someone else had asked me to dance and he saw that and came over," said Arlene Quiñones-Vargas. "When he asked me to dance he was a true gentleman and that's something I really liked about him."



Photos by Pam Brooks/The Connection

**Daniel, 7, flashes a smile as he prepares to play a Batman video game on dad, Danny Vargas', computer.**



**Danny Vargas, who works from home, ensures there's time for his family. Vargas is pictured with wife Arlene and oldest son Daniel.**

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After serving in the military for seven years, Vargas began working for a government contractor that transferred he and his new wife to Northern Virginia from Texas. By 1995 he decided to pursue a career and education in telecommunications.

Quiñones-Vargas said her husband's intelligence and passion for issues surrounding the Hispanic community have led him to follow his love for politics.

"He's always loved politics and he's always been more up to speed politically than I have," said Quiñones-Vargas, a senior project manager for Fairfax County.

"Now that he's been given the opportunity, since he owns his own business, he's been able to do a lot of networking," she said. "Being involved in the community, that's something he's always wanted to do."

AS PRESIDENT of VARCom Solutions, a provider of marketing, sales and communications support services, that also specializes in Hispanic market outreach, Vargas has built his own business. He has also used this as an opportunity to become active among fellow Hispanic business leaders and with political committees.

Locally Vargas is active in the Herndon Dulles Chamber of Commerce and its Hispanic Business Committee. At the state-level he is active on the advisory board of the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and is working to put together a board of business leaders from the Washington, D.C.-metro area to address local issues.

Politically, he is the chair of U.S. Rep. Frank Wolf's (R-10) Hispanic Advisory Committee, a member of the Republican National Committee's Hispanic Advisory Committee and a member of the Fairfax County Republican Committee. Vargas is also active with local gang prevention efforts, the Fairfax Partnership for Youth and the Northern Virginia Family Services board and advocacy committee.

"I think his motives are clear," said Daniel Scandling, press secretary for Wolf. "He has a big heart, he loves living in Northern Virginia and is committed to making Northern Virginia a better place to live and raise a family."

COMPARED TO HIS childhood, the biggest challenge Vargas faces today is balancing being a father of two young boys with his growing business and community involvement.

"I don't know how he finds the time and the energy to do it all," said Alfredo Casta, president and CEO Cascades Technologies, Inc.

Also a Hispanic business owner active in the Herndon Dulles Chamber of Commerce and Hispanic Business Committee, Casta hired Vargas to help promote his expanding IT business.

"You can definitely see his view and his vision for doing something for the community," said Casta. "And, it's not self-serving."

One reason he is so involved is because he is always self-analyzing for fear of falling back into a bad situation, said Vargas.

"I've never stopped clawing," he said. "You can always sink back in, and I have never forgotten where I came from." Even with work and political engagements constantly filling his calendar, Vargas makes it a point to split the parenting responsibilities with his wife.

"As far as our family is concerned, he's a true protector of the family," said Quiñones-Vargas. "But, you can see that soft side of him – the kid in him – when he's with our children."

Because he missed the opportunity to have a childhood, Vargas said his boys are the perfect "excuse" for him to be a "kid at heart."

He also takes his experiences as a father to his professional life when he works with students to show them there is life outside of gangs, poverty and drugs and alcohol.

"The reason I am not dead or in jail right now is because I had one teacher who saw enough to take me to the Library of Congress to do some research," he said. "That let me see there was a world out there. Today, the best thing in my life is my kids and my family."

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