NEWS RELEASE

Ameris Bank Celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month

2021-09-21

National Hispanic Heritage Month is underway, running from September 15 through October 15. Ameris Bank is fortunate to be represented by teammates with a variety of backgrounds from Latin America. From food, family, dancing and beyond, our teammates shared what makes them proud of their heritage.

Sebastian Riveros, mortgage banker
Colombia's influence throughout the world is very apparent. From Grammy-winners such as Shakira to newer artists like J Balvin and Maluma who dominate the airwaves with their reggaetón music. World-renowned author Gabriel Garcia Marquez won the Nobel Peace Prize in literature for his novel "100 Years of Solitude."

Colombians are a very passionate people. The best way to experience our passion is by watching a national soccer game or by drinking un cafecito Colombiano.

Carmen Franco, customer service specialist
I was born in Puerto Rico, and one of the things I miss most are the holidays we celebrate in the Caribbean. As children during Los Reyes Magos (The Three Wise Men), we would enjoy going around with our shoe boxes to collect grass for the camels (supposedly). This a cultural tradition I will always carry with me.

Michelle Wells, universal banker
I was adopted from Paraguay as a 7-month-old on May 31. Every year, my parents and brother celebrate this day as a second birthday. We don't celebrate any Paraguayan traditions, but I cherish this day as part of my own history.

Sabrina Rucker, loan processor
My parents are from El Salvador and we have a huge family. El Salvador is known as the Land of Volcanoes because it has more than 100 volcanos, twenty of which are potentially still active. Of course, we are most known for our

pupusas and tamales. This is a staple in my household, especially around the holidays!

JP Bouillerce, commercial loan closing specialist
I'm Puerto Rican and whenever I think about my culture, I reflect on spending the summers outdoors as a child. Every day was an adventure, whether it was hiking through the El Yunque rainforest, kayaking in the ocean, wandering the historic streets of Old San Juan or exploring the hills of rural Puerto Rico. It's such a special island. There is a large sense of pride that comes with being Puerto Rican, and I feel proud every day to call it my homeland.

Irene Castro, assistant branch manager
We celebrate La Virgen de Guadalupe (Our Lady of Guadalupe) every year on her birthday, December 12. We go to church, sing for her and cook different dishes like tamales. In my personal life, she represents a very important role.

Lisa Strickland, branch manager
I am Mexican-American and value my heritage. I was not fortunate to grow up around my father's side of the family, but I greatly enjoy the times I do get to visit my family, immerse myself in Hispanic culture and share the most delicious traditional meals. I do not speak Spanish, but I would love to learn. I love hearing my grandparents and other family members communicate then translate their stories.

My grandfather, Samuel Garcia, was instrumental in the desegregation of schools in Bastrop, Texas. My father, Samuel Garcia Jr., retired Master Sergeant in the United States military, was one of the two top chefs chosen for Air Force One when Lyndon B. Johnson was president. So again, I am so very proud of my heritage.

Lina Urrego, application engineer
Columbia’s most popular style of dance is Cumbia, which also happens to be one of the most popular music forms in all of Latin America. Originating as a courtship dance among West African descendants in Colombia’s Caribbean coastal region and Panama in the early 19th century, the Cumbia was originally performed using only drums and claves. Eventually, the music incorporated influences from the indigenous Kogui and Kuna tribes (including flutes and percussion), the Spanish (European guitars) and even German immigrants (who brought the accordion to Barranquilla in the 19th century).

By the mid-20th century (a.k.a. “The Golden Age”), Colombian artists such as Pablo Galán and Lucho Bermúdez had crafted a refined form of Cumbia, which helped the music spread to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and beyond. Today, traditional Cumbia is often blended with dancehall reggae, hip-hop and electronic musical influences to create a more modern, accessible sound. And while the pop music of Shakira and Rock en Espanol of Juanes may be more widely known in the U.S., it’s Cumbia that is the epitome of Colombia’s rich, distinctive cultural fusion.

Deborah Turner, personal banker
I'm from Salvador, Bahia – Brazil. Salvador was the first capital of Brazil because of its geographic location. Salvador is filled with beauty, music, art and history. Our food is delicious. We are famous for our traditional feijoada, a dish with black beans and churrasco or Brazilian barbecue. My city is also known as the host of the best and most famous carnival in the world, which includes seven days of fun, music and dancing on the streets. What's not to like, right?

Brazilian music is also known for bossa nova, música popular Brasileira and samba. Artists like Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, Nara Leao and many more are internationally recognized. Salvador is located on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean and the beach is visible everywhere you go. Brazilians are happy people by nature. We love soccer, Carnival and, most of all, spending time with family and friends.

Like I said, Brazil is a beautiful place, and my city is the BEST!

Tanya Haupin, item processing specialist
One of my favorite holidays is Christmas Eve. Back in Miami, we would always have a special family dinner and get together on Christmas Eve, whether it was at our house or our cousins' house to celebrate. I remember our traditional dinner consisted of shredded pork, yuca, maduros (fried bananas) and rice and beans. It was all about celebration and family gatherings.

Edgardo Valentin, customer care specialist
Puerto Ricans are very extroverted and friendly people, but we also are very protective of our culture and traditions. This is one of the many reasons why Puerto Rico is and has always been a commonwealth for so long.

Maura Giron, mortgage compliance specialist
I am Cuban. I am an American Cuban. I say that with pride because my parents sacrificed and left the land they loved to be able to give their family a better life with endless opportunity. But to say I am Cuban, I must share that Cuba is a multi-faceted culture - I am also Italian, Spanish, Lebanese and African, and I embrace ALL of my ancestral cultures.

We are known for great food like ropa vieja (old clothes), arina con chicharone (corn meal with pork grinds), desserts like flan (caramelized custard) and many more. We are a lot more than the Cuban sandwich!

We are also known for good-spirited music like salsa. Celia Cruz, the Queen of Salsa, has represented Cuba with so much love. Don't forget about our rum, which comes from sugar cane, café con leche that wakes us up with just the smell and great Havana cigars.

Finally, Cubans are known to be loud, but that's called passion. We embrace the love of family and friends that unites us. Make some Cuban friends today and see how we will embrace you, too, with our love, family, food, music and more.

Adriana Rewis, head teller
Colombia is such a beautiful country known for its wonderful people and rich culture but also for its wildlife, rainforests and landscapes. I probably don't have enough words to describe it, but I will try to simplify it in a few words.

The music is an essential part of Colombia, and I guess it's one of the reasons I love to dance. Growing up, I remember that dancing was one of the essential "duties" to learn. It was a must, and that's why we can move our hips like Shakira. You can find different kinds of weather from the coldest to the hottest temperatures since Colombia is located in the equatorial zone, and it's bordered by two oceans. Its food is so delicious, especially when prepared and cooked by my beautiful mother! We are sports fanatics, especially when it comes to soccer. Colombian coffee cannot be missed in my mornings, and, of course, the flowers. Colombia is one of the top exporters of flowers in the world. Every time I have the chance to travel to Colombia and look through the plane's window to see the magnificent landscape, mountains and rivers, I am overcome by a sensation I cannot describe.

I am of two nationalities. I became a citizen of the United States in 2002. My son was born in this country, but he was raised with the pride of his mom's ancestors, culture and traditions, as well as his father's ancestors, culture and traditions from right here in Georgia. So, what can I say? I cannot be more proud to be a Colombian-American!

Raphael Mejia, underwriting team lead
I always like to take the opportunity to point out the beauty of Latin cultures. There is an unfortunate tendency to associate speaking the Spanish language with one particular culture, but there are many and they are all distinct. I am fortunate enough to be a mix of two very beautiful cultures. My father was born in Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic, and my mother is of Puerto Rican descent. Both cultures have the same roots in the Caribbean as they were Spanish territories and were inhabited by the native Taino tribes.

The marriage of the native tribes and Spanish cultures created beautiful and thriving cultures all of their own. Both speak Spanish and have a great deal of similarities in food, dialect and traditional clothing. They share the love of the same music: Puerto Rico with salsa and the Dominican Republic with bachata and merengue. Each has a distinct and singular sound which mixes heavy percussion with brass, piano and various native instruments. From my youngest ages, I can remember hearing the music of Ruben Blades, El Gran Combo De Puerto Rico, Celia Cruz and Hector Lavoe filling my home. I remember hearing Johnny Pacheco and Johnny Ventura's merengue on Saturday mornings and my mother teaching me to dance before I was even in kindergarten.

The citizens of both countries are filled with an enormous sense of pride for their music, art and culinary contributions. I was born in the melting pot of New York City, and I am 100 percent American but have very strong ties to my Latin culture and its roots. I strongly encourage anyone who has never explored these cultures to do so. The food is amazing. The music is full of life. The people are warm. I am profoundly filled with pride to call myself a Hispanic-American.

Fernando Ycaza, director of healthcare banking
Growing up in Ecuador, I remember always having my family members close by, including my grandparents. My aunt lived to the right of our home, and my grandparents lived to the left. Uncles, nieces and nephews lived within 5-10 minutes. We were very fortunate to always be surrounded by family, and most families in Ecuador live this way.

The merchandise sold at farmers' markets and artists' markets never had a price on them, leading to a lot of bargaining. This is very common in South America and it can lead to comical interactions between business owners and patrons. The most common way of greeting someone in Ecuador is with a kiss on the cheek. Lastly, I distinctly remember that every celebration growing up had fried plantains and music. Some of my earliest memories have dancing in them, mostly salsa music.

Ingrid Rincon Evans, assistant branch manager
I was born in Cali, Colombia. My family celebrates the Christmas season by singing villancicos (Christmas carols) and celebrating the birth of Jesus with the Novena de Aguinaldos, a Christmas advent prayer. We also celebrate by eating buñuelos (fried cheese balls), pandebonos (baked cheese balls), natilla (a custard dessert) and arroz con leche (rice pudding).

Katherine Torres, junior loan officer
My family is from El Salvador, so my mom prepares one of our favorites dishes every year called pupusas. They are thick corn tortillas with cheese, mashed pork and potatoes. We can never get enough! El Salvador is the Rhode Island of Central America in terms of size, but it is so beautiful. It is also known for being one of the most popular places for surfing.

Ines Sarante, teller
I was born on the beautiful island of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is rich with history and culture that, much like its people, is passionate and vibrant. It's a blend of Tainos, Spanish and African cultures - all three are seen in modern day Puerto Rico.

Salsa is the style of dance most people associate with Puerto Rico. Traditional Puerto Rican music is salsa and merengue, but mostly salsa and aguinaldos (Christmas music) during the Christmas season.

One of my favorite memories as a child was during Christmas. Puerto Rico has the longest Christmas season. We start the holiday right after Thanksgiving, and it extends into the new year with the celebration of Three Kings Day on January 6. People spend holidays singing parrandas (Christmas carols). Puerto Ricans often take part in traditional Christmas caroling, gathering around homes and singing as a surprise.

Enid Johnson, assistant branch manager
In Puerto Rico, Christmas Eve is a more significant celebration than Christmas Day. During this time, family and friends get together to sing, drink and eat lots of amazing traditional foods like pasteles, arroz con gandules, morcilla and pernil, finished with coquito. This is a tradition that my family continues to this day!

Terri Bennett, assistant branch manager
My father immigrated to the United States from Mexico City as an orphan when he was 14 years old. Entrepreneurship and hard work are evident in the Hispanic culture, and he was a great example. He owned his own company for 20 years.