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From left, John-Michael Cortez; his wife, Priscilla Guajardo Cortez; Lonnie Limón; and Perla Cavazos are part of the Hispanic-focused charity FuturoFund Austin. About 20 founders launched it in October, and the group is adding members. Each member contributes \$500 a year and has one vote.

AUSTIN: PHILANTHROPY

With eye to future, Austin Latinos supporting philanthropy

New FuturoFund Austin seeks to tap growing pool of young Hispanic professionals.

By [Juan Castillo](#)

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Coming of age in East Austin, Lonnie Limon did not have to look far to find Hispanic leaders. Among the role models he admired were public service-minded people like Gus Garcia, who would go on to become mayor, and business owners like his grandfather Fidel, who for nearly 50 years has run Estrada's Cleaners & Tuxedo, the East Seventh Street fixture bearing his surname.

Limon, 35, left Austin in the late 1980s, but on his return a few years ago, he was struck by the metamorphosis of Austin's Latino population, the fastest-growing demographic group in the city. Garcia still earns respect as an elder statesman, and Estrada's is still in business. But Limon noted striking changes in the tableau of Latinos who now make up one in three Austin residents and who reside all across the city, not just on the east or south side.

"I saw many Hispanic professionals. Now we're business owners of high-tech companies. We have attorneys, judges, and I look at these people, and I feel like a kid again," said Limon, a third-generation Austinite and an account director with the LatinWorks advertising agency.

Limon is among a few dozen, mostly 40-and-under Austinites who are tapping into that growing pool of younger Latino professionals to support a new Hispanic-focused philanthropy. Dubbed FuturoFund Austin, the nonprofit organization hopes to benefit community causes while building a new generation of Latino leaders, said Priscilla Guajardo Cortez, associate director of development for the University of Texas. Cortez is a founding member of FuturoFund along with her husband, John-Michael Cortez, a community relations official with Capital Metro.

Cortez said FuturoFund Austin seeks to create a culture of giving among Hispanics. "What naturally tends to come with (philanthropy) is people not only developing an awareness of community needs, but they do something about it. Leadership is an outcome," Cortez said.

The endeavor is apparently unique in Central Texas, said MariBen Ramsey, vice president of the Austin Community Foundation, which manages FuturoFund and more than 750 charitable accounts in Austin. In fact, Ramsey has heard of only a few Hispanic-focused giving circles in the country, most notably a successful one in Chicago.

"We think what they're doing is really important," said Ramsey, noting the area's surging Hispanic population. According to the Pew Hispanic Center, the Latino population of Travis County grew 88 percent from 1990 to 2000.

Ramsey said FuturoFund continues a popular trend of grass-roots organizations bringing together demographic groups and exposing them to causes outside their own experiences and interests.

"They become aware of these causes and give to them," Ramsey said. "That is a huge learning experience for all of us in the community."

About 20 founding members launched FuturoFund at an event in October, during which they doubled their ranks with new recruits. Each member contributes \$500 a year to a collective fund and has one vote.

More social networking and recruiting is planned, and next October, members hope to award their first grants to local nonprofit organizations in five broad funding areas: education, health and human services, the arts, community development and social justice.

Perla Cavazos, a founder and a policy analyst for state Sen. Eddie Lucio Jr., D-Brownsville, said supporters include Latinos who already interact in their business and social lives, are doing well professionally and want to give back to the community.

"It's important to reach out to help other folks that are struggling and need a hand to get out of poverty or to have access to opportunities like we've had," said Cavazos, who counts affordable housing as a cause "near and dear to my heart."

A depressed economy is a challenge, however. Limon said he recruited seven friends who committed to joining, but others, nervous about the economy, told him to ask again in January. Ramsey, whose foundation manages funds with a total of more than \$100 million in assets, said the economy is affecting all philanthropic organizations to some degree, "but I don't think it will stop (FuturoFund) from reaching their goals."

Limon took his father, Virgil Limon, and mother, Diana Limon, who owns Diana's Flower Shop next door to Estrada's, as well as grandmother Hilda Lopez to a FuturoFund launch event at UT. Although they were excited, they seemed awestruck by the group's goal of raising thousands of dollars, Limon said, explaining that they are accustomed to giving considerably smaller amounts to neighborhood youth baseball teams, church groups and similar causes.

Limon said that while that kind of giving is still needed, "we're trying to take something to the next level and use all of our resources and strengths."

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