



*Fernando Rosa (left) meets with Portugal President Anibal Cavaco Silva during the president's visit to Newark, N.J. The two met again last month when Mr. Rosa was in Portugal.*

## **Neighbors**

*Resident heads a national advocacy non-profit organization working to improve opportunities for the Portuguese-American community*

by Lynn Woike

As chairman of the Portuguese American Leadership Council of the United States, Inc., Fernando Goncalves Rosa meets regularly with ambassadors, chiefs of staff, senators and other high-ranking dignitaries around the world.

Last month, he traveled to Portugal to visit his mother. While on vacation there, he met with Portugal President Anibal Cavaco Silva, his chief of staff and with the president of the Luso-American Development Foundation, an international foundation on Portuguese American issues that is a major supporter of council.

His involvement is also as local as 730 North Mountain Road — home of the 800-member Portuguese Club of Hartford. Begun in 1927 in Hartford, it moved to Newington in 1971.

Connecticut has the fourth highest percentage of residents who are Portuguese — 1.3 percent.

Of Newington's 29,300 residents, 873 are Portuguese.

According to demographics pub-

lished at [www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com), 12 percent of the town's foreign-born residents are from Portugal.

A large concentration of Portuguese-Americans is in Hartford and its surrounding towns, Mr. Rosa said.

In addition to the Portuguese Club, three other pillars serve the Portuguese-American community.

Our Lady of Fadama Catholic Church has been in Hartford since 1958.

"It's a very active church" with about 1,250 members, he said.

Established in 1990, The Portuguese Foundation Inc. is a non-profit, non-religious, non-political group that moved from Hartford to West Hartford. It strives to connect Portuguese Americans to the rich, cultural heritage of their ancestors. It also has a statewide college scholarship program, awarding more than \$171,000 to students of Portuguese descent.

The Holy Ghost Portuguese Society in East Hartford, founded in the 1970s, is the fourth pillar.

Mr. Rosa has a hand in them all. "I am extremely involved in our community here," he said. "I'm one of the founders of The Portuguese Foundation. I've been a director of the Portuguese Club for 25 years. I serve at the church on the economic council.

"He's involved in everything in the Portuguese community — the club and the church ...," Carlos Santos said of Mr. Rosa. The former president of the Portuguese Club added, "He's an important member of the community, always willing to help people, no matter the problem."

"Sometimes my days are long and my nights are short. A lot of my activities happen to be on the weekend, so sometimes the week gets to be a full seven days," Mr. Rosa said.

He is employed by the Hartford Economic Development Corporation as a deputy director man-

aging programs for the state's small and medium sized businesses.

Mr. Rosa also serves as an alternate on the Newington Development Commission.

He has been a member of the leadership council since 1995. Based on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., the council is a non-profit 501(c) 3 organization dedicated to addressing domestic and international concerns of the Portuguese-American community. For 20 years it has been expanding its program, serving its community through increasingly active government relations efforts, the promotion of ethnic accomplishments and encouraging stronger ties between the United States and Portugal.

Now in his second one-year term as the organization's chairman — a volunteer position — Mr. Rosa continues the work of advancing the community professionally, politically and culturally, while

ensuring that issues affecting the community are addressed through its network of government and community leaders.

"It's a major voice of Portuguese Americans," he said of the council. "It deals with issues that are common to every community."

Issues include visa waivers that allow people to come to the United States, internships, immigration reform and deportation.

"We serve as a bridge between the Portuguese government and the U.S. Congress, and the White House and the Portuguese embassy."

"The leadership council works with all the regional organizations. We listen to them. We try to bring some of their issues to the forefront," he said.

"We're trying to keep our ear to the ground and talk to members of Congress" to see where they are going with major issues. "We try to educate them on the needs of the community," he said. "There's a lot to be done when preparing immigration laws ... We want to be a part of it. We want to educate the people who are responsible for making those laws."

As a bridge, the leadership council also brings back information from the national level to "educate the people who are affected" by decisions at the national level.

"We're not a lobbying group. We're an advocacy group ... a bridge," he said.

Whether the subject is deportation reforms put in place in the mid-1990s that are now targeting people they were not necessarily meant to apply to or the future of the U.S. Air Force base in the Azores, an archipelago under Portuguese control, "the dialogue needs to be open and frank," he said.

Dealing at the national level "takes a lot of my

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time," Mr. Rosa said. To manage the demands, he's become a master at time management.

Before his vacation last month, he was in Washington D.C., where he met with two senators, four congressmen, and both the American and the Portuguese ambassadors — all in the same day — assisting in the bilateral relations of the two countries.

His term ends in February. Being elected to a third term is rare.

"The [Portuguese] community is being assimilated; some things will be lost. We need to be sure there's still enough of the culture and the language to keep the community going ... You can't lose all of the culture. We're trying to preserve some of the background, the roots, the customs," said Mr. Rosa, who moved to Newington from Wethersfield about three years ago.

Another active member of the community is Jose "Zak" Bravado, director and president ex-officio of The Portuguese Foundation. He said of Mr. Rosa, "Professionally, we began working together more than 20 years ago; he was a founding member of The Portuguese Foundation. I was working for the law

firm that helped incorporate the foundation, and then I came on board as the recording secretary. I recently served as president for the group for two years.

"On a personal level, I've known him for more than 30 years. He has a travel agency in the Parkville area that he's owned and operated for many, many years. My parents would go to see him ... to book their flights to Portugal."

He praised Mr. Rosa for working to get "the hundreds of small state organizations and social clubs that exist for Portuguese-Americans to work together on a national level ... It's good to keep the community tied into the issues that affect them."

"They've done a good job in bringing attention to so many different people who've been instrumental in the community they live in and are of Portuguese descent," he said of the leadership council.

In 2009, the council held its national gala in Connecticut. This year, the event will take place Nov. 12 in National Harbor, Maryland.

Locally, Mr. Rosa, on behalf of the council and state Rep. Rosa Rebibbas, R-Naugatuck, are organizing the third annual Portuguese reception in the Hall of Flags at the State Capitol June 10 from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Among the four who will be honored

is Gracinda Lavado of Newington, president of the pastoral council at Our Lady of Fatima.

Celebrating the Day of Portugal in Connecticut took place June 4-5 with traditional food and live music at the Portuguese Club. On Sunday, there was a mass at Our Lady of Fátima Catholic Church, followed by a parade. Mr. Rosa was a keynote speaker at festivities that took place at the state capitol June 4 while the Portuguese flag flew on the capitol's middle mast.

There are more Portuguese events to look forward to.

Festa de Santo António, a feast honoring Saint Anthony, will take place at Our Lady of Fatima June 18-19. It will feature Jose Malhoa, an artist coming from Portugal, and elaborately costumed individuals doing traditional marches.

On Aug. 27-28, The Portuguese Club will hold its annual picnic.

"Everyone is invited," said Jorge Carvalho, club president.

The event will feature Portuguese food and live music.

While the club promotes Portuguese culture, "you don't need to be Portuguese to come," he said. **ML**