

## **Hartford honors Civic Volunteers, including the newly-created Commission on Refugee and Immigrant Affairs**

**By Judy Wyman Kelly, July 2014**

On a recent lovely summer evening, I made my way to the 19<sup>th</sup> floor of a Hartford skyscraper for a very special reception honoring some of the city's most hard-working volunteers. Generously hosted by the law firm Shipman & Goodwin, the locale offered a panoramic view of downtown Hartford, the majestic Connecticut River, and the state's many rolling hills off in the distance. It was a view "one doesn't get to see very often," exclaimed one of the guests.

I had come to support and thank the newly-appointed members of the Hartford Commission on Refugee and Immigrant Affairs (CRIA). With backing from the Hartford Public Library, the Hartford City Council, and the Mayor, the 21-person Commission will help refugees and immigrants engage in civic life, provide a forum for their ideas and concerns, and facilitate entry to the city for all new arrivals.

Dining on delicious appetizers and sipping refreshing cocktails, members of the various boards and commissions chatted and shared stories. Dr. Rebecca Thomas of the University of Connecticut School of Social Work and an immigrant from India, shared some of her reasons for joining the Commission, "I have benefited from an education, interaction and engagement with my adopted country, and I would like to share some practical insights to a policy body that can effect change and work with the members of the Commission to best meet the needs of immigrants and the host communities."

Rio Comaduran, born and raised in the U.S., said she "hopes to continue to bring immigrant and refugee issues to the forefront, ultimately affecting policy shifts and changes at the city level, and at the same time encouraging civic engagement and social capital building amongst immigrants. And as a proud Hartford resident and grand-daughter of Mexican immigrants, there's really nothing better! "

Mayor Pedro Segarra thanked all of the volunteers and commissioners for their service, spending some time with the new CRIA members—American citizens Thomas, Comaduran, and Eva Jacobson, as well as Georges Kingsley Anan, a recent immigrant from Cote d'Ivoire, Dean Rhoden of Jamaica, and Balam Soto of Guatemala. Mayor Segarra commented, "Hartford has always been a city of immigrants – from its founding to the present day. I am so excited

about the new Commission. We can help our new arrivals with their dreams and aspirations and they will contribute to the health and vibrancy of our city.”



Newly-appointed Commissioners posing for a photo after receiving thank you gifts from the city, from left to right: Dean Rhoden, Rebecca Thomas, Rio Comaduran, Balam Soto, Georges Kingsley and Eva Jacobson.