

NEW YORK'S NEW BREED

Members of an emerging group of young and charismatic Hispanic politicians:

■ RUBEN DIAZ JR.

In 1996, while still a student at Fordham University, he became one of the youngest candidates ever elected to the state Assembly. It didn't hurt any that his father is Ruben Diaz Sr., a political powerhouse who runs one of the biggest anti-poverty program empires in the Bronx. Once he got to Albany, however, the younger Diaz proved to be smart and hardworking on the Assembly's Transportation Committee. He also evinced more moderate views than his controversial, conservative and rabidly anti-gay father.



■ HIRAM MONSERRATE

A Puerto Rican-born former Marine and New York City cop, Monserrate, 37, won a City Council seat representing Corona, Queens, in 2001. He became that borough's first Hispanic elected official. His victory came despite stiff opposition from the Queens Democratic machine. Since then, he has shown those maverick tendencies in the Council. A member of the New York Civil Liberties Union, he often speaks out against police brutality. And he has been effective at challenging the mayor's office and Council leadership on several issues.



■ JOSE PERALTA

Another former union official, Peralta, 33, is a protégé of Central Labor Council president and Queens Assemblyman Brian McLaughlin. Born in the Dominican Republic, he is a former student body president at Queens College. He won an Assembly seat in 2002, representing Corona and Jackson Heights. In Albany, he has a reputation for being serious and even-tempered and as a relentless advocate for mass transit.



■ DIANA REYNA

A protégé of Vito Lopez, one of Brooklyn's top Democratic bosses, Reyna, 31, was elected to the Council in 2001 to represent Bushwick. The Dominican-born Reyna quickly became effective at representing her district, one of the poorest in the borough.



■ ANNABEL PALMA

A former hospital worker and union organizer, Palma, 33, won a City Council seat in 2003 from the Soundview/Parkchester/Castle Hill areas of the Bronx. She was a virtual unknown when she was elected with the backing of her powerful union, 1199/SEIU, and the Bronx Democratic machine. She has since become an outspoken advocate for her district, especially on labor and community health issues.

the Institute for Puerto Rican Policy, "except that it helps to have an incumbent screw up."

Unlike Los Angeles or San Antonio, Falcon says, New York's Latino voters are "more diverse." Puerto Ricans are the largest voting group, but there are also significant and growing numbers of Dominicans, Colombians and Mexicans who don't always see issues the same way as Puerto Ricans.

Except for Cuban-Americans, most Latinos tend to vote for Democrats.

"A lot of Republicans don't want to alter their politics to accommodate reaching out to Latinos," Falcon says. "They're not Latino-friendly."

As for this year's mayor's race here, few experts expect that Fernando Ferrer, the early front-runner in the Democratic field and the only candidate

who is Hispanic, will mount the kind of juggernaut campaign that Villaraigosa did.

For one thing, Mayor Bloomberg has unlimited cash to throw into his reelection bid. In addition, he has worked hard to build closer ties with many African-American leaders and to woo support in the city's fast-growing Dominican community.

Some key black leaders who supported Ferrer for mayor four years ago have refrained from doing so this time. More than a few privately hope for a Bloomberg victory because it would pave the way for City Controller William Thompson, the city's highest-ranking black official, to run for mayor in 2009.

But Ferrer's Hispanic supporters warn that their backing for Thompson four years from

now, when the percentage of Latino voters in the city is bound to be even bigger, is far from assured.

Adolfo Carrion, who succeeded Ferrer as Bronx borough president, has made no secret that he would like to run for mayor, and he could challenge Thompson.

A former teacher and city planner, Carrion is the most accomplished and charismatic of a new generation of Latino politicians in New York.

"Some of those emerging leaders are very smart and have great potential," Falcon said. "But the old guard is holding on to power, setting the agenda for them right now."

That won't last for long, Falcon predicted. Over the next few years, those younger leaders will contend for key posts.

jgonzalez@nydailynews.com

School on toxic site sweet deal for owner

BY BILL EGBERT
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

AN ASBESTOS-FILLED former electronics factory was "uniquely suitable for use as a school," according to a controversial analysis done last year for the School Construction Authority.

The report cleared the way for the site's owner to seal a 20-year lease with the city worth more than \$1 million a year — a payout the School Construction Authority conceded was high.

The deal also required more than \$6 million of city money be used to renovate the building, quadrupling the value for its owner Abraham Leser, a developer with a history of lucrative deals with the school system.

The Soundview Educational Campus, at Colgate and Story Aves., opened last September, months after Sholom & Zuckerbrot Realty examined the abandoned property to determine a fair rent, documents show.

The brokers compared the building, which once was used to store pesticides, with three converted industrial buildings more than 2 miles away in Westchester Square.

The brokers suggested a rent of \$12-\$15 per square foot for the "uniquely suitable" two-story building, even though "the value of other industrial properties may be slightly lower."

After the report, Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott signed a zoning waiver so the city could sign a lease with Leser and open the school quickly.

The Education Department has defended the deal as a cost-

effective way to add seats for hundreds of students in a borough that still needs to find classroom space for 10,000 children.

"It was the right size and location and within a reasonable price range," said Education Department spokeswoman Kelly Devers.

Leser's deals with city education officials have drawn scrutiny before. In 1996, Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau subpoenaed all documents related to his multiple leases with the then-Board of Education.

No indictment resulted, but a Daily News investigation at the time found the city was paying him nearly twice the local market rate for the industrial warehouse properties he leased for use as public schools.

The estimated value of the Soundview building increased to more than \$8.8 million from \$2 million after the city paid to renovate the facility and clean up its asbestos and lead problems, according to city tax assessments.

Leser, who did not return calls from The News, cashed in on the increased value about a month after the school opened. Documents show he took out a \$7.8 million mortgage on the property last November with New York Community Bank in Jericho, L.I.

Elevated levels of several toxic chemicals were found in the air inside the school in March. But Education Department officials have said the campus is safe for its 600 students.

wegbert@nydailynews.com

HALE BIKERS WITH DIAPERS



ANTHONY DELMUNDO

Hundreds of motorcyclists deliver thousands of diapers to Hale House in the 10th annual Bikers for Babies event. Their goal is to provide six months of fresh protection.

