

Global Mission in Action

Colombia's Transformation on Display at ICC

By Lauren Burgoon
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The revitalization of Bogotá, Colombia from a war-torn city to a vibrant center of business, culture and arts is on display at the Bunn Intercultural Center gallery this month.

"Bogotá: The Proud Revival of a City" shows an urban transformation through the past 15 years. Sponsored by the Colombia Program at the Center for Latin American Studies, the exhibit's 39 five-foot panels showcase modern life in the city.

"It's very visual so you can see how the city is improving," said Gerard Martin, director of the Colombia Program. "A lot of good things are happening there but a lot of the time, people here don't see it or know it's happening."

The exhibit brings Bogotá's transformation alive to the Georgetown community, he added. The exhibit is taking place at a time when the university's involvement in the Latin American country is increasing.

The Colombia Program's main work is with USAID's "Areas for Municipal-level Alternative Development." Focusing on 100 Colombian communities, the project aims to mobilize the population to improve the republic.

"We talk with municipal leaders about how to institute democracy in their areas, and help them better understand how to lead and be proactive," Martin said. "Each town decides for itself how they want their power structure to be set up."

Georgetown staff – the program has seven full-time employees in Washington, D.C., and five in Colombia – help design the training sessions and research best practices to study.

The project also focuses on security plans for the selected towns. Martin acknowledged that many people still think of violent crime and drug trafficking when considering Colombia. But the country is changing, he said.

Those changes are shown on the panels. In one, "the recuperation of public space," Bogotá's city center and parks are showcased. These are areas where gang activity used to be endemic, but now are occupied by community groups.

In "the promotion of culture" panel, pictures show modern dancers moving in sync on stage, street pa-

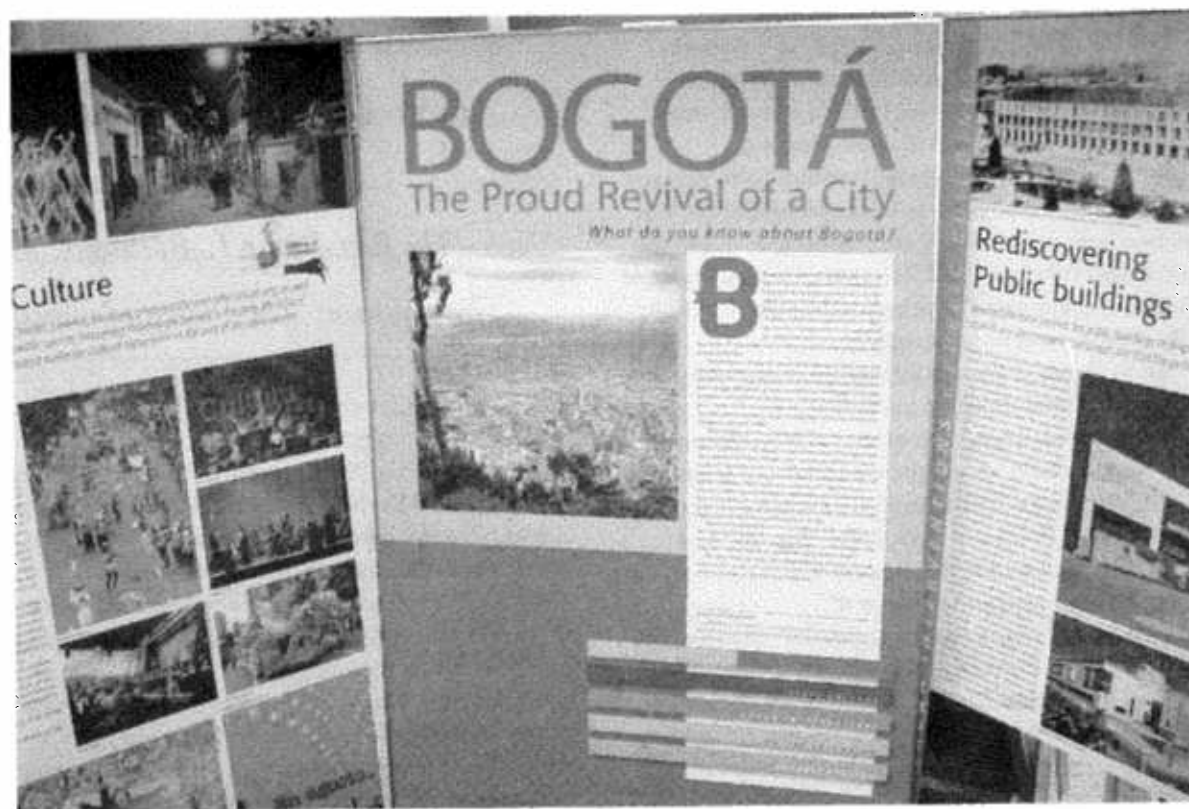


Photo by: Lauren Burgoon

Five-foot panels portray the revitalization of Bogotá, Colombia. Topics include improved transportation, renovation of outdoor spaces, cultural offerings and more.

They were nearly brought to their knees by organized crime, Mafia-like activities and illicit trading," Martin said. "They have chosen to face that head-on and overcome it."

Martin said he hopes the 100 selected communities will inspire the remainder of Colombia to embrace reforms.

Georgetown's involvement also will continue. Until just a few years ago, security risks prevented students from working in Colombia under the university's sponsorship. But now several have visited and more show interest every semester, Martin said.

Working with Colombians to revitalize their nation is part of Georgetown's global mission, the director

"Colombia is one of the most important Latin American countries in terms of trade and its geographic strategic position," he explained. "It's one of the largest Latin American countries and very important to the U.S. If Colombia is stable, we all benefit."

The Colombia Program is holding an opening for the exhibit on Nov. 6 from 2 to 4 p.m. in the ICC executive conference room. Staff members from the program and Center for Latin American Studies and master degree candidates will speak on Colombia.

The panels will be on display in the ICC gallery until Nov. 16. The exhibit is in conjunction with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Cultural Center, IDB Urban Exchange and Colombia's Min-