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S&P 500 1,362.30	▲ +8.34	NASDAQ 2,358.06	▲ +8.15	DOW 12,480.30	▲ +96.41	SPY FUND 4.33%	▲ +.05	CRUDE OIL \$81.64	▲ +.65	1-YR T-BILLS 2.35%	▼ -.02	EURO 1.4776	▼ -.0001	GOLD \$825.00	▼ -2.10
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Chamber opens conflict resolution center

BY SUSAN CHARNECO SAKAGAMI
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Of The STAR Staff

The Chamber of Commerce inaugurated a Conflict Resolution Center in Old San Juan to provide a forum that is totally neutral and extremely economic, Chamber President José Julián Álvarez announced Tuesday.

Álvarez was accompanied by University of Puerto Rico Law School Dean Roberto Aponte Toro and attorney Ramón Mullerat, an arbitration expert recognized in Europe and by the American Bar Association in the United States.

"In Puerto Rico there is a need for more vehicles and alternate methods for conflict resolution that help minimize the number of cases filed in the courts," Álvarez said. "To tend to part of this situation, we have created the Conflict Resolution Center of the Chamber of Commerce."

"It will be available to all the institution's members and to any person, company or business that becomes a chamber member and requires this kind of service to resolve controversies of a commercial nature," he said during the inauguration on Tuesday.

Álvarez explained that mediation is a voluntary and non-adversarial process where a neutral third party called a "mediator" helps the parties to find a solution through dialogue.

On the other hand, arbitration is a voluntary and informal process of adjudging in which a neutral and impartial third party with a formal training, called an "arbitrator," receives the arguments, theories, versions and evidence of the parties in the conflict

and, based on that, issues a decision or award that can not be appealed. This process is generally faster than taking the issue to the courts.

Both processes are confidential within the Chamber of Commerce's Conflict Resolution Center. The parties can select a neutral third party from a list of mediators and arbitrators.

"I'm completely convinced that this center will alleviate, to a great degree, the current situation in Puerto Rico's courts," said Álvarez, who is also director of the Fiddler, González & Rodríguez law firm.

"Many of the cases of a commercial nature that are submitted there may have a satisfactory solution for the parties without reaching that forum and even better, with a significantly lower cost," he said.

Álvarez thanked Aponte Toro for supporting the Conflict Resolution Center.

There are many benefits to mediation and arbitration but a key component is that since it's private, it helps to prevent the process from becoming contaminated which favors both parts because publicity can negatively affect someone's commercial or personal image.

The agility of business activity also makes it necessary to quickly resolve controversies generated through commercial exchange relationships. As a result, many professional associations are moving to create and implement mediation and arbitration mechanisms.

Some of the cases that are eligible for mediation or arbitration are collections; leasing of movable and immovable goods;



Chamber of Commerce President José Julián Álvarez announces the inauguration of the Conflict Resolution Center, as University of Puerto Rico Law School Dean Roberto Aponte Toro, far left, and arbitration expert Ramón Mullerat look on.

insurance, transportation and distribution contracts, and damages of a commercial nature.

Those who wish to use the services of the Chamber of Commerce's Conflict Resolution Center can visit the center, located

on 100 Tetuán Street in Old San Juan or visit www.camarapr.org.

"I exhort you to call us and confirm the advantages that using this kind of forum has to resolve any kind of controversy," Álvarez said.

Office Depot plans more P.R. stores



Office Depot's first store on the island is its location near San Patricio Plaza.

BY ZODET NEGRON
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With two stores open and another on the way, retailer Office Depot reports it is altering its plans for Puerto Rico to add more stores.

While they have only been open for a short while, customer reaction has been so positive, Office Depot is not stopping at three stores, according to Melissa Perlman, spokesperson for Office Depot.

"Customers are reacting positively to our stores," said Perlman. "We've had so much success, we're definitely opening more."

Perlman explained that when Office Depot decides to enter a market, they consider the number of

small businesses in the area, their primary customers.

"We really felt Puerto Rico was a place where we could offer a new option," said Perlman.

Office Depot opened its first store on the island at San Patricio Plaza, in the former Puerto Rico Telephone customers service center, in late September of last year. Their second store, located in Los Jardines shopping center in Guaynabo, opened in early December.

"This is a new market for us but our entry has been very successful," said Perlman.

The office supplies retailer is scheduled to open its third store on 65th Infantry Avenue in Carolina in late March of this year. The Carolina store, which will measure approxi-

mately 23,000 square feet, will take over a former Roger Electric location.

Perlman could not confirm locations for other stores at this time.

Each Office Depot store generates 20 to 25 jobs.

Office Depot is not only growing locally but in the United States, as well. Last year, they opened 70 stores in North America and they have 75 stores planned for 2008.

Office Depot has over 1,200 stores in 49 states and the District of Columbia, 30 stores in Canada, 42 stores in France, 23 in Japan and eight in Hungary and it operates 178 stores in México, El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Israel, Thailand and Korea. Their annual sales are \$15 billion.