

Elorza gala enlivens Cranston St. Armory

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PROVIDENCE — Mayor Jorge Elorza celebrated his inauguration in the cavernous Cranston Street Armory, just a few blocks from his childhood home.

He hopes Monday night's gala, which drew nearly 1,000 politicians, educators, business leaders and artists, will inspire someone to come forward and revive the castle-like edifice to its former glory.

"This is back to the future," said City Councilor Bryan Principe, who lives nearby. "John Chafee was the last elected official to hold his inaugural ball here when he was governor."

Holding the celebration at the long moribund armory, a brick structure



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Tamara Kaplan, of New Urban Arts and the Providence Youth Arts Coalition, parades through the Cranston Street Armory, helping to welcome the city's new mayor, Jorge O. Elorza.

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GALA

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Guests hope for change

that defines the West End, has electrified the neighborhood, Principe said.

"He signifies change — new blood," said Deb Norman, who owns Rue De L'Espoir, an East Side restaurant. "Jorge Eloza is here for the long run. He's not part of the political machine."

The armory looked its best Monday night. The exterior of the building was bathed in red and yellow lights while the ballroom sparkled with spotlights. The band shifted easily from rock 'n' roll to rhythm and blues. And images of local nonprofits such as New Urban Arts flashed across giant video screens.

"It's the promise of a new day," said Cathy Lund, the owner of City Kitty. "I'm optimistic about the city."

Then she added, "The mayor should get a cat."

The crowd included a long list of bold-face names, including U.S. Rep. David Cicilline; state Representatives Scott Slater and Aaron Regunberg; Councilman Wilbur Jennings; Brett Smiley, the mayor's chief operating officer; Supt. Susan Lusi; Bert Crenca, director of AS220; and Hillary Salmons, executive director of the Providence After School Alliance.

Several attendees said Elor-



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Guests, including Rep. Grace Diaz, D-Providence, fourth from left, pause for a photo during a break in the entertainment Monday night at the Cranston Street Armory.

za represents a fresh sense of optimism in Providence, especially for those neighborhoods that have felt neglected in the past.

"He spoke of creating opportunity in every neighborhood," Cicilline said. "You left his inauguration with a feeling of confidence that he will move the city forward."

Cicilline gave Elorza an orange umbrella with a capital "P" emblazoned on it.

Smiley, who dropped out of the mayoral campaign and threw his support behind Elorza, said he heard "a consistent message" from Elorza, "one of hope and optimism."

Smiley said that the mayor, by inviting 1,000 people to the space, hopes "to spark the

imagination of someone" who might want to invest in the building.

"It doesn't cost a penny to draw attention to an issue," he said.

Elorza's story has resonated with many newcomers to the city. His family arrived in the United States in 1975 with little more than the shirts on their backs.

"The American dream is still alive and it is our responsibility to see that it endures for generations to come," he said during his inaugural address earlier Monday. "My family's story is Providence's story."

Elorza was sworn in Monday as the city's 38th mayor. Elorza is a former Housing Court judge and law professor

at Roger Williams University. He is the son of Guatemalan immigrants who worked in factories.

He barely graduated from Classical High School and was rejected by every college he applied to before graduating from the University of Rhode Island and later graduating from Harvard Law School.

As the formal gala began, Victor Capellan, co-chair of Elorza's transition team, invited a Classical High School student to take the stage.

She sang Elorza's campaign song in Spanish and many in the crowd sang right along with her.