



Hartford Bites: Piolin

By: Priscilla Rubio & Violeta Wara Villacorta Apaza

We, two Trinity College students, partnered with the SINA to explore and share the diverse foods found in Hartford. We visited a variety of restaurants representing different cultures in this great city. We began our journey in the heart of Hartford's vibrant Latine community, Piolin Restaurant, serving the authentic flavors of Peru since 1998.

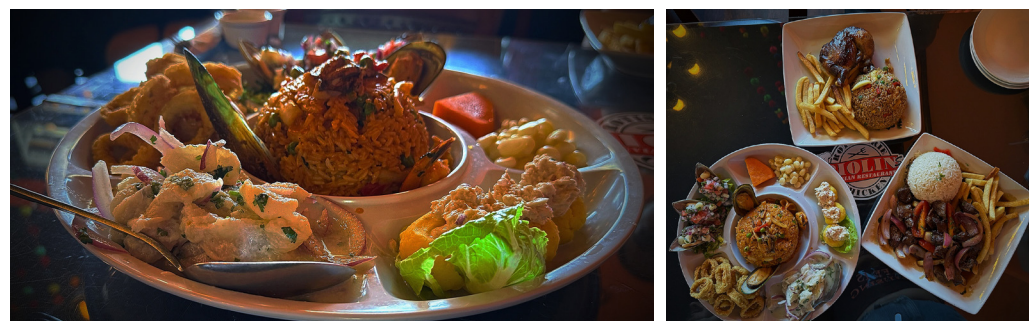
Its senior restaurant sits on New Britain Avenue, offering a true taste of the country's rich culinary heritage. As a result of their success, they have opened multiple Piolin locations in Connecticut.

Upon arrival, we were kindly greeted and sat near a corner. The inside was decorated with colors, symbols, and pictures exemplifying their Peruvian roots. At the center of our table, a leather napkin holder stood out, featuring three llamas intricately engraved on its brown surface. These llamas, symbolic of Peruvian culture, hail from the Andes Region, long integral for transportation, wool, and more. Bright colorful wool garlands, often found in Peru's streets, hung from the ceiling.



We asked our waiter Christian, "Qué deberíamos comer?" (What should we eat?). He pointed at the circular Piolin logo, indicating their specialty in rotisserie chicken "Pollo a la brasa". He also recommended trying the "Ronda Marina" (Round Marine) platter, offering a sampling of six popular dishes. Prior to our visit, we had heard positive remarks about their sweet Chicha, a traditional corn-based beverage. Each of us ordered a glass of Chicha, and for sharing, we requested the Ronda Marina, Pollo a la Brasa, Lomo Saltado, and Arroz Chaufa. The Ronda Marina became a favorite because of the Ceviche de Pescado, white fish "cooked" in lime juice with cilantro and onions. The flavors literally melted on our tongues.

Peruvian cuisine is a blend of indigenous traditions and immigrants' contributions, reflected in popular dishes like Arroz Chaufa and Lomo Saltado. These exemplify the fusion of Chinese and Peruvian cooking, brought together by 19th-century Chinese immigrants. In fact, the name Arroz Chaufa comes from the Cantonese word "chaufan," meaning "fried rice." The dish evolved to incorporate local ingredients like aji amarillo (yellow chili pepper) and Chinese staples like soy sauce, becoming a beloved national dish and Piolin's specialty. Similar to Lomo Saltado, its fusion comes from Peruvian seasoning and Chinese Wok cooking techniques. While we dined, Latin melodies softly played in the background, and the warm ambiance momentarily transported us to Peru. If you have yet to visit, you're truly missing out.



SOUTHSIDE INSTITUTIONS
NEIGHBORHOOD ALLIANCE
207 Washington Street
Hartford, CT 06106

About SINA

Since its founding in 1977 SINA has worked with residents and community organizations on issues such as affordable rental housing, education, public safety, homeownership and employment. With nearly 100 homes built, a thriving Walk to Work Program, and the creation of community gardens and murals, its visible impact in the Frog Hollow, Barry Square and South Green neighborhoods has been significant. SINA continues operations today in offices at 207 Washington Street. For more information call (860) 493-1618.



Sharing Ideas during Neighborhood Tour

SINA recently led an engaging neighborhood tour for 20 residents from Connecticut Children's, organized by Luis Rivera. The participants shared valuable ideas on what they would like to see in future developments, including the commercial space in the upcoming parking garage and the former car wash site. Throughout the tour, attendees had the opportunity to learn about SINA's rich history and its ongoing efforts to improve the community. The feedback from the residents provided important insights that will help shape the future of the neighborhood, ensuring it meets the needs and expectations of those who live and work there.



www.sinainc.org



Celebrating Dean Iaiennaro's 20+ Years of Dedication at SINA

SINA is a partnership between Connecticut Children's, Hartford Hospital and Trinity College. SINA's mission is to work cooperatively with community stakeholders to restore economic vitality and improve the quality of life for the people who live, work, play, and study in the neighborhoods of South Central Hartford.



Celebrating Dean Iaiennaro's 20+ Years of Dedication at SINA



After more than two decades of dedication, innovation, and commitment, we will bid farewell to a true pillar of SINA — Dean Iaiennaro. Dean will be retiring the summer after an extraordinary career that has touched countless lives and transformed neighborhoods. His work has been instrumental in creating homes and opportunities for families, leaving a legacy that will resonate for years to come.

Dean's journey to SINA began with a simple belief: the work needed to be done. It wasn't about seeking an easy path but embracing challenges. He was inspired by John F. Kennedy's famous words: "We do these things not because they are easy, but because they are hard." Dean's career has been defined by facing challenges head-on and making a meaningful difference.

One of the most meaningful aspects of his work is its tangible impact on families. Dean has witnessed firsthand the power of homeownership in building generational wealth and creating opportunities for future generations. "When you see the good that comes out of the homes—how they change lives and provide stability—that's what keeps you going," he shared. This past December, 42 Madison Street, once a blighted and abandoned house, was beautifully decorated for a family's first Christmas in their new home. Scenes like this have been made possible again and again thanks to Dean's tireless efforts.

Moneca Liz knows personally what it's like to benefit from Dean's work. She and her husband Juan were among the first to purchase a SINA home in 2001. "There is no better way to imprint your name and traditions in a city than by investing in a home," Moneca said. "Owning our first home opened new doors of opportunity for our family that we would not have had otherwise." Juan now works as a registered nurse at Hartford Hospital, and their oldest daughter followed in his footsteps. One son is training to be an electrician, and another plans to buy a SINA home. Moneca and Juan's investment created the foundation that enabled two generations to live, work, and give back to their neighborhood.

Dean showcased his aptitude for self-learning and passion for housing construction long before joining SINA. In his twenties, he built his own home, relying entirely on a book to guide him. His mother, anxious about the risks, was particularly concerned about him wiring the entire house. Dean shrugged off her worries, thinking, "How difficult can it be? There are only three colors." This curiosity and determination to learn laid the groundwork for his career.



Dean's first job out of college was at the Hartford Housing Authority, where he helped fill vacant apartments and transition families into their new homes. It was there that he unknowingly helped Eddie Perez and his family move into an apartment. Many years later, Eddie still remembered this pivotal moment. This connection and Eddie's knowledge of Dean's great work at Broad Park Development led



Before and After shot of 41 Madison Street

him to recruit Dean to join SINA full-time. After years of service, Dean transitioned to Florida, where he opened his own consulting business. It was there that SINA's next Executive Director, Luis Caban, met with Dean during a vacation and persuaded him to return to SINA. Dean came back to continue his impactful work.

Dean's influence on affordable housing and community development extends far beyond his work at SINA. As Executive Director of Broad Park Development, he played a role in landmark projects, including the construction of El Mercado, a cultural marketplace on Park Street, and Zion Hill, a series of five apartment buildings providing 52 rental units. Dean was also instrumental in launching the area's first homebuyer assistance program, utilizing Urban Development Assistance Grant funding. Following his time at Broad Park, Dean worked at the Connecticut Housing Investment Fund, helping secure funding for housing projects across the state. Between stints at SINA, he also founded Metro Realty Advisors LLC, further demonstrating his commitment to real estate development.



Scan for Impact Map

The housing market and neighborhood that Dean is leaving behind are vastly different from the one he greeted two decades ago. When SINA was building its first homes, there was concern that no one would buy them. SINA created credit readiness and homebuyer programs to build a pipeline of interested buyers. Now, we face the opposite problem: before we list a house on the market, we already have multiple people interested in purchasing.

In the early 2000s, when the housing market was at its lowest and blight was at its peak, Eddie Perez seized an opportunity to purchase 50 vacant lots and abandoned properties for close to nothing. Dean worked tirelessly to transform each of those properties, one home at a time. In the Spring of next year, when the four new homes on Zion Street are completed, SINA will be out of those properties, and Dean will have accomplished his goal. With these final homes, Dean will have been directly involved in creating 94 homes and 82 rental housing units across nine buildings, housing over 250 families. It's hard to imagine how different the neighborhood would be without these improvements.

Dean's retirement will mark the end of an era, but his legacy will live on through the work he's done and the countless families whose lives were changed by his efforts. We thank Dean for his decades of service, leadership, and unwavering dedication to making a difference.

Congratulations on your retirement, Dean. You will be greatly missed, and your contributions will never be forgotten.



The Benetiz Family: 29 years in their SINA home



Paper Donation Drive Supports Hartford Schools

At SINA, we believe every student deserves the resources to succeed in their education. Recently, we responded to an urgent need when two schools — HMTCA (Hartford Magnet Trinity College Academy)

and Bulkeley High School — faced a critical paper shortage. This shortage was significantly impacting students and teachers, and we worked with local partners to ensure the schools could continue providing quality education.

The situation began when a concerned student at HMTCA shared that teachers were struggling due to a lack of paper. The shortage was so severe that teachers could not print homework assignments and class materials. Nancy Mendez, Executive Assistant to the Principal, explained the school was short about 2,500 cases (10 pallets) of paper for the rest of the year. For both middle and high school students, this shortage was urgent, as many do not have laptops or internet access at home. Printed materials are crucial to their learning experience.

Bulkeley High School faced a similar issue, and Debbie Gabriel, Executive Assistant to the Principal, confirmed they needed 10 pallets of paper across both campuses. It became clear that this issue was widespread, affecting multiple schools in Hartford.

At a Neighborhood Revitalization Zone (NRZ) meeting, we shared the paper shortage, and Keith Grant, Vice President of Operations at Hartford Hospital, was in attendance. Keith immediately recognized the seriousness of the situation and offered help. He followed up with Hartford Hospital's procurement team, who contacted W.B. Mason to explore a solution. Within a short time, over \$20,000 worth of paper—20 pallets—was donated to the schools, covering their paper needs for the rest of the school year.

The donation was a remarkable act of generosity. Ryan Donahue, Senior Director of Procure to Pay at Hartford Healthcare, coordinated the deliveries to the schools. When the paper arrived, both HMTCA and Bulkeley High School staff were overwhelmed with gratitude. It was an unexpected and vital gift that enabled teachers to continue providing high-quality education.

Nancy Mendez expressed her thanks in a letter to Hartford Hospital after the delivery: "The HMTCA family is incredibly grateful for this donation. The impact on students, staff, and families is enormous. The timing was perfect."

This donation exemplifies how community collaboration can make a tangible difference in students' lives. Thanks to the swift action and generosity of Hartford Hospital, these schools now have the resources they need to continue providing quality education to their students.

We are now looking for donations for our second paper drive to help students at Hartford High School & Sports Medical Sciences Academy. If you'd like to contribute, please contact Priscilla Rubio at prubio@sinainc.org.