

## JAMAICA PLAIN

# Holiday greetings, with love, from JP

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Danny Peña solemnly pulls a greeting card with a picture of Snoopy from a stationery box. He shows it to a group of 12 adults squeezed into the couches of a small living room. Each card in the box will carry holiday messages from a donor to a needy family receiving a Christmas dinner.

What makes this Christmas drive different? Everyone in the room is from the southern Dominican Republic village of Bocacanasta. The cash raised will help pay for Bocacanasta's poorer families to serve roast chicken, pork and sweet potatoes called batatas on Nochebuena, the night of Christmas Eve.

The concern is especially sharp this year, after the deaths of more than 200 people — many of them Dominicans — in the crash of Dominican-bound Flight 587 in New York.

Nearly every \$25 dinner donation is collected from Bocanasteros settled in Jamaica Plain, the heart of Boston's Dominican population.

"We don't get funding from the government or anywhere else. We raise the money ourselves from within the community," explains Rafael Peña, one fund-raiser. Last year they paid for more than 100 dinners, and this year they hope to pay for 150.

The group meeting in the Minden Street living room is El Comité de Bocacanasta, a group dedicated to the village.

The annual Christmas drive is just one way the committees maintain links between Bocacanasta and Boston. Donations collected here have also helped pay for street repairs, an aqueduct, and telephone lines back home.

And, by Christmas, village youth will start playing their league baseball games in a new stadium. Many of the committee members will return home for their winter vacations in time for the stadium's inauguration. Bocanasteros who normally are thousands of miles apart will dance together to bachata and merengue.

"When I am there I see many of my friends that live here," says Luis González, the group's community-elected president.

The Internet helps the Boston branch of the community feel closer to home. The village launched its own Web site this year ([www.bocacanasta.com](http://www.bocacanasta.com)) and the page opens to time and weather reports in Boston and Bocacanasta.

Like the Bocacanasta Committee, Boston hosts similar groups from neighboring communities such as Villa Sombrero, Llano and Matanzas. Sociedad Progresista de Villa Sombrero Boston will sponsor a Christmas party and baseball tournament for the children in the town Villa Sombrero.

As the Bocacanasta committee wrapped up its Sunday night meeting, member Rafael Peña listed the donors, with their names and relations to one another, as if he were reciting a biblical passage.

His colleagues applaud when he's finished, and Danny Peña passes the Snoopy cards around the circle. The message they send: the donations will continue.

"We want to do something for the community," said committee secretary Josefina Sanchez, "and we have to do it ourselves."