



## We Are Citizens - Holiday Traditions: Little Candles Day

The end of the calendar year typically brings about wishes of happy holidays.

But as Citizens embraces its diversity, it is important to recognize all holidays and make sure everyone feels a sense of belonging when celebrating holidays of their heritage and tradition.

Here is the second feature in a series of stories of employees and holidays they celebrate as part of their heritage and tradition.

### Little Candles Day

"El Día de las velitas (Little Candles Day) is a very special holiday in Colombia," said Tatiana Ossa, Customer Care Supervisor in the Consumer and Policy Services division. "It is celebrated on December 7 and commemorates the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX in 1854."

On this night, people place candles and paper lanterns on windowsills, balconies, porches, sidewalks, streets, parks and squares – everywhere they can be seen – in honor of the Virgin Mary and her Immaculate Conception. On December 8, it is customary for houses to hoist a white flag with the image of the Virgin Mary all day.

"While we live in Florida, we celebrate it here as well to honor our traditions," Tatiana said. "It typically starts in the evening because the tradition is to light up rows of candles outside with friends and family. It is a time to share with your loved ones and it's the unofficial start of the Christmas season for Colombians. In my family, we love this tradition since we get to spend time together and my husband and I get to pass on our traditions to our children."

According to Tatiana, they try to buy different colored and different sized candles – sometimes even having family members bring candles from Colombia just for that day. This is part of the tradition – to see who can make the biggest candle wax ball. The kids compete trying to grab as much wax as possible.

During this festival – as well as throughout the entire Christmas season – Tatiana and her family like to eat traditional Colombian food such as buñuelos (cheese fritters), hojuelas (flakes), and natilla (cinnamon milk custard). "Eating these foods takes us back to our childhoods and our Christmases growing up," she said.

"Since the celebration has a religious background, we do say a few prayers to Virgin Mary," Tatiana added. "Then we play traditional Christmas songs in Spanish, which we call Villancicos, which really helps put everything together and it helps the kids practice their Spanish."

"This day is very special and it connects us to our friends and family," Tatiana said. "It's time that we spend away from technology and electronics, and a time we can give thanks for all of the blessings we received throughout the year."

