

DEAR FRIENDS:

The public climate for Latinos continues to worsen in the absence of comprehensive immigration reform and with media figures stirring emotions against immigration in general and undocumented immigrants in particular. Journalistic reports underscore hazardous conditions in detention centers where at least 67 unauthorized aliens have died for lack of adequate medical treatment since 2004. The brutal murder of an undocumented Mexican at the hands of Shenandoah High School students last July is but the latest reminder of the kind of dehumanization that vulnerable immigrants are enduring. We at LALDEF continuously advocate to protect the civil rights of Latinos and promote policies embracing their full integration into American society. In this newsletter we include the stories of three families whose experience attests to their invincible spirit and the effectiveness of our efforts.

Here are some of our accomplishments over the last few months:

- The Latino Reform Youth Council (LRYC) is a group formed by LALDEF trustee, Moises Santizo to support the educational aspirations of Latino youngsters. LRYC is now launching FUTURO, a three-year peer mentorship pilot program aiming to provide encouragement, advice, and other resources to students as they pursue their post-secondary education. Latinos have the lowest rates of college enrollment in the U.S. and those who make it into four-year institutions often confront major social and economic obstacles that jeopardize their success. FUTURO will create a human buffer around striving college students to increase the likelihood of their graduation.
- Our Bienvenida Program is now joining forces with the Boaz Community Corporation to offer legal counseling and representation in immigration and family law. Given prevailing confusion and bureaucratic delays, one of our highest priorities is to provide the means for eligible immigrants to advance towards legal status and citizenship. The collaboration between LALDEF and the Boaz Community Corporation is a fruitful step in that direction.
- On June 21st, LALDEF presented a testimony before Governor Corzine's Blue Ribbon Panel on Immigration. The testimony focused on the need to extend resident college tuition to immigrant students who have grown up in New Jersey, but lack federal permanent residency. Undocumented children raised in the U.S. face limited opportunities in education and employment because of their irregular status. LALDEF supports the educational and employment related goals of those students.
- We continue to build our Victim's Fund launched in 2006 to address the unmet needs of crime victims. Immigrants are among the most vulnerable preys of robbery, physical assault, and even enslavement. Our Victim's Fund defrays expenses for such things as transportation to court hearings, translation services, medical assistance, visa filing fees, legal costs, and other necessities required by victims to survive as they recover.

Will you help us to continue these and other efforts? We are accredited by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as a 501(C)3 organization. Your contribution to LALDEF is fully deductible. Enclosed is a self addressed envelope for your convenience.

Thank you for helping us to sustain immigrants in their pursuit of the American Dream.

Patricia Fernández-Kelly
Chair

FAMILIES BEATING THE ODDS



Ana Avila

Ana Avila and her mother, Hilda, at Ana's high school graduation

Ana graduated from high school this year and was admitted to Rutgers. Unfortunately, she does not have a green card. She is legally in this country with a humanitarian visa. Although Ana has been here since age 2, her immigration status is technically temporary and therefore she was originally deemed not eligible for in-state tuition. With the help of LALDEF that decision was reversed. Here is Ana's testimony before the Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Immigration:

"For the past 16 years, I have walked down the streets of Jersey City and have imagined that city when hearing the word "home." I attended a local public elementary school, graduated salutatorian of my eighth grade class, and attended McNair Academic High School with a 3.8 GPA. At McNair, I became the Senior Class President and joined the Junior ROTC program. Since then I have amassed over 180 hours of community service—surpassing the mandatory 50 hours required before graduation. I have always been fond of learning and the concept of attending college was never a "maybe" nor an "if;" it was always a "yes" and "when." My mind did not contemplate hurdles, it did not think of money as an obstacle; I simply concentrated on my studies and assumed everything would take care of itself. I stand here today, writing an unforeseen chapter and remain optimistic that my dreams of majoring in Finance will become a reality. I refuse to be part of a stagnant generation. I want to be able to give back to the community that raised me and know that a college education is the first step to thank the only home that I know."



Sanchez-Cortes family

Benigno Sr., Isai, Benigno Jr. Johana, and Sara

Beni Sr. came first from a village near Oaxaca as a single man to California where he had siblings and worked in landscaping but always wanted to pursue a musical career (he plays several instruments-self taught); then he came to Princeton to play in a professional band but that venture didn't take off so he went back to landscaping. With the assistance of LALDEF's Bienvenida Program he became a brand new citizen, although he failed his first English test. He almost didn't make it to his second interview, but told himself he had to make it and he did!



Founded in 2004

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www.laldef.org

Helping People Get the Help They Need

Beni met Sara in Princeton and the couple were married here 18-years ago. Sara, also from Oaxaca, originally came with her two daughters. She is very active at St. Paul's Church as the youth Catechism coordinator for the Hispanic congregation. Her children have been altar girls and altar boys. Johana (20), an A-student, wants to be a lawyer. She is a sophomore at Mercer County Community College and works for a local law firm. She and Sara finally got their green cards this year, after an agonizing 10+ year process. Beni Jr. and Isai were born here. They are in high school in Hamilton. When asked about how he felt about his mom's and sister's legalization, Isai said "now I don't have to worry about them coming home every day".

Quiej Family



From left Jennifer, Javier Sr. Ebelin, Graciela, Johana, Javier Jr.

Javier Quiej and his wife, Graciela, fled civil war in their native Guatemala 17 years ago. Fearing for their lives, they crossed illegally into the U.S hoping to obtain political asylum. Their application was denied. The couple stayed without authorization, raising a son and three daughters—one of whom is disabled—in Princeton Township. Javier worked as a shoe repairman in the Hamilton area. His 20-year old son, also named Javier, is a Princeton High School graduate who worked in a Hamilton-area delicatessen and hoped to be the first in his family to attend college.

Last March 13th, agents from the federal Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) came pounding on the door of the Quiej family's home and arrested father and son, on old but active deportation orders. LALDEF rapidly mobilized to provide assistance. Immigration attorney Steve Traylor, a LALDEF trustee, represented the detainees. The two men received an indefinite reprieve from deportation and were reunited with their family.

Maria (Charo) Juega, trustee and co-founder of LALDEF, was quoted in local newspapers as saying that the family "thanks God and ... the people of the community who made this possible." She also said the elder Javier Quiej pays taxes and files income tax forms every year—she can testify to that because she prepares the forms for him.

LALDEF'S TESTIMONY TO THE GOVERNOR'S BLUE RIBBON PANEL ON IMMIGRATION JERSEY CITY, JUNE 11, 2008

We appear again in front of this panel to speak on the issue of extending resident college tuition to immigrant students who have been raised in New Jersey, but lack federal permanent resident status.

The New Jersey Assembly Office of Legislative Services has determined that the cost to taxpayers of admitting these students would be zero dollars. State aid to colleges and universities is not adjudicated on a per capita basis, and the increase in enrollment would be miniscule, or some 1,200 students state-wide. Also, let us not forget that the parents of these students, as de facto residents of NJ, are taxpayers themselves

There is no need to increase capacity in the existing institutions to accommodate these students. The financial outcome to most of these institutions would be a net gain in tuition revenue that would not otherwise come into their coffers.

It is argued that enrollment demand at state colleges and universities exceeds capacity, and that immigrant students would displace legal residents. This claim is false. Most of these students would attend community colleges which have open enrollment. Community colleges are actively recruiting to fill their spare capacity and would welcome such students.

Those competing for admission to 4-year schools would face highly selective admissions criteria. If they were admitted it would be because of their high academic credentials. When did competition on the merits become "unfair" in New Jersey?

Finally, the premise that these students will never acquire permanent resident status is also false. Many of them are involved in the long, convoluted process that will eventually confer the coveted green card. Do we want these deserving youngsters to put their lives on hold for years? Would we all not be better off by having these young people ready to go when the federal government comes around to admitting that the legalization of an unauthorized population of over 12 million people is an inescapable imperative?

LALDEF's work is made possible by grants from the Princeton Area Community Foundation, The Harbourton Foundation, the McAlpin Fund, the Mary Owen Borden Foundation, individual donations, and the support of Nassau Presbyterian Church and volunteer time from community members.

Your contribution to LALDEF is fully deductible. Enclosed is a self addressed envelope for your convenience.