State of Hispanic-Americans' Civic Engagement in Summit County

Developed by St. Bernard Catholic Church's Proyecto Raíces & Asian Services In Action, Inc. (ASIA)

The Hispanics/Latinos are the fastest growing racial group in the United States. The increase in this ethnic population has important implications for local, regional and state public policy. In December of 2009, ASIA and Proyecto Raíces jointly conducted a community forum to better understand Summit County’s Hispanic-American population and to better know the factors which hinder or support their civic participation.

**DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS:**

- **Ages 18-60**
- **Countries of origin:**
  - Mexico, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Colombia, and Peru
- **Years in the United States:**
  - 73% have been here 10 years+
  - 21% have been here for 5 years+
  - 6% have been here for 1 years+
- **Current professions:**
  - Domestic service: housecleaning, landscaping
  - Home manufacturing and construction
  - Hospitality industry, restaurants, hotels, and motels
  - Service industry: health and beauty salons

**HISPANIC-AMERICAN COMMUNITY’S CHALLENGES**

**Work-based discrimination:**
There is unequal treatment of Hispanic-American workers by their employers based on the stereotype that all are undocumented. Employers expect their Hispanic-American workers to work harder than others. Workers are not given proper time off due to illnesses or allowed to seek medical attention. Employees are often afraid to ask for such a request for fear of losing their jobs.

**Support for safe access to transportation:**
Safe modes of transportation are critical for the community in order for them to go to work to help rebuild America’s economy. An opportunity is there to educate the community about traffic laws, eligibility for driver’s license, proper infant/child restraint, and various options for transportation so they can get to and from work safely.

**Lack of proper information:** Families delay school enrollment for their children, delay seeking preventative medical care, and generally limit their interaction with hospitals, schools, and health and human services because they do not have the proper information about their rights and eligibility for such services or support.

**HISPANIC-AMERICAN COMMUNITY’S ASSETS**

- **Churches and other religious institutions** are important places for information, education, support, and assistance.
- **The availability of bilingual providers** is a critical factor for where the Hispanic community seeks help and information.
- **The community strongly desires and wants ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and civics classes** to better integrate into American society.

**OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION**

- **100% of the participants** have a strong desire to be U.S. citizens
- **Participants want greater access to reliable and credible immigration attorneys** to assist individuals and families in applying for citizenship.
- **The community would like accurate and timely information about any federal comprehensive immigration reform and on any newly established immigration policies; the community wants opportunities to participate in the political process.**
- **Trust is an important factor in gaining access** to the Hispanic-American community in Summit County; more importantly, informal networks are the main sources of relaying information.

(Transcriptions and summary prepared by ASIA's Eunice Park and Yoon Kim)