Friday, March 24, 2000

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Peru, said language was the main obsta-cle standing in the way of Hispanics. "The biggest thing I would stress to my community is the learning of English," she said. "There is an attitude among a lot of Hispanics that says 'I can't learn it,' but they have to get jobs to make money somehow. "However, the English courses avail-

able are few and not very good, so I can't blame them completely." Harper said difficulty in communica-tion could be one reason most Hispanics could be found working in lower-class jobs.

"I notice that they are mostly 'n nouce that they are investig-involved in blue collar jobs, stocking shelves at grocery stores, cleaning hotels or working as kitchen and wait staff at restaurants," he said. "But the biggest field for Hispanics is definitely construction.

Palmer said the high cost of living in Chapel Hill had forced many Hispanics to work several jobs, and some families even shared small apartments to ease

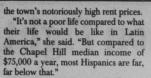
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the hardest elements of her family's transition to the United States.

"We had no credit history," she said. "We had been here as a tourist, but when it came to applying to a bank, they couldn't provide us with loans because they didn't know how good we'd be." Fort said they were lucky enough to

be put in contact with an agency for peo-ple moving to the United States from other countries.

Fort said another major challenge fac-



Both Harper and Palmer said a general misconception was that al Hispanics were in the United States ille all "Most of them come with green gally cards," Harper said. "There is a stereo type out there that all Hispanics are ille-

gal, and that is just not true." Palmer said those who were here ille-gally faced amazing hardship. "If they don't have papers, one of the biggest problems is exploitation in the

workplace, since they have no defense," she said. "There is injustice out there, and I see it every day." Chapel Hill Town Council member Pat Evans said the council was very stratius the corecent of the literation

attentive to the concerns of the Hispanic community. "We try to have Hispanics on boards and committees to get them involved in town government," she said. "It's important to reach out to them, and I think we try to do that.' Evans said several issues came to

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information easily.

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mind regarding the Hispanic communi-ty in Chapel Hill. "Housing is a very important issue," she said. "As a town, we've also started doing more printing of bilingual documents so that people can do what they need to do, whether it is straing a library card use a drivery library getting a library card or a driver's license.

"We were even talking about having a story hour at the library in Spanish," said. "So, obviously, there are a lot of different issues.

She said Chapel Hill was lucky to have such a prominent Hispanic com-munity because of their addition to the

area's work force and diversity. "We have a very low unemployment rate, and we are fortunate to have the people to fill the jobs we need to fill, no matter who they are," she said. Harper said that though Hispanics

could perform many jobs, they had not yet broken into at least one field. "There are only a few Hispanic-owned businesses," he said. "However, I expect that number to grow as we have more Hieranice mere into the "We haven't seen many Latino busi-

nesses because, a, there haven't been that many Latinos until recently and, b, they haven't stayed that long," Harper

England, and my husband speaks English," Fort said. "It has been difficult to communicate because of my family; I

municate and felt isolated, and I cried a ot. I kept thinking to myself, when will this be over, and instead of crying I went and learned (English) and that's when I really started my life."

When Fort moved to America, she said she felt that even though she was able to communicate in the same language as her neighbors, she did not

said. "But as their command of English grows and they move into managerial positions, more Hispanic businesses are sure to be created."

Tony Sustaita, owner of Bandido's Mexican Restaurant and the Hideaway, both on Franklin Street, said one of the reasons for the lack of Hispanic-owned businesses in the area was cost. "It's too expensive for most Latinos,"

he said. "It costs a lot of money to open a business, and rent prices around here are outrageous. I pay more in rent in Chapel Hill than I did in Atlanta."

Sustaita said that although Chapel Hill was for the most part racially peace-ful, some surrounding areas did not share the same harmony.

"I have not faced any prejudice in Chapel Hill," he said. "I have not expe-rienced any particular problems. In places like Hillsborough, however, being of Mexican descent is not a plus." far as law enforcement is con-

cerned, the main problem with dealing with the new population of Hispanics is difficulty in communicating. "Lack of communication is the

biggest problem, and we're taking steps to fix it," said Chapel Hill Police spokesalways understand the society in which

they had grown up. Fort said she had questions concern-

ing the unfamiliar American perspective surrounding women's issues and independence. She said it was the American culture's

acceptance of women that gave her the ability to enter the work force and gave her 8-year-old daughter Andrea the confidence to dive into community pro grams

"My daughter was able to do soccer here," Fort said. "She never thought of doing that before - a woman soccer player (in Latin America)? No way!"

woman Jane Cousins. "We've recruited Hispanic officers and bilingual officers, and that helps.

"We've also applied for a grant from the Governor's Crime Commission to provide better services to Spanish-speaking victims of domestic and sexual abuse, as well as more specialized training for our officers."

Cousins said some of the difficulties could result from some Latin Americans' different views of law enforcement officers and their role in society. Most Latin American countries have endured military dictatorships at some point in their history, and the image of police as an oppressive force continues in many of these countries.

"Part of the communication problem is the preset image of police," Cousins said. "In Latin America, there is a different relationship between the people and the police, and we try to educate (Hispanics) about what law enforcement

is in the United States." Carrboro Police Chief Carolyn Hutchinson echoed Cousin's concerns about communication problems with minorities. "Obviously, the language barrier is the largest impediment

When Fort moved to the area, she began working by volunteering in Andrea's school, Mary Scroggs Elementary. "In the Carrboro school system, I could see children that were coming to the (United States) and help them get situated on a one-to-one basis and give them confidence," she said.

Fort volunteered with the Lincoln Center Offices, which houses several outreach programs for immigrants then started working for the Early Head Start program, where she helps educates immigrants about English and American culture.

"They were open to me bringing my



Hutchinson said, "Half of our officers have been taking a nine-week occupa-tional Spanish course, and we'll proba-bly enroll the other half as well."

Hutchinson said her officers were doing their best to accommodate the new residents and serve them as well as possible.

"I wouldn't call it problematic, but it is something we deal with on a day-to-day basis," she said. "The best thing we can do is increase our ability to get our point across, and I think we're trying to do that."

Palmer said that though work and liv ing conditions could be worse than those found in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, some stereotypes and atti-tudes still needed to be conquered for the Hispanic community to truly feel at home

"Some people have called me and told me that Americans were getting along fine before Hispanics came along," she said. "This attitude, and the abuse of Hispanics in the community, is incredible." incredible."

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experiences to them, and I learned from them," she said. "I work with a team of norm, site said. I work them for help or if I have any questions or doubt." Working with Early Head Start's fam-ily programs for mothers and children

from newborn to 3-years-old, as well as visiting numerous families at home, Fort comes into contact with Hispanics struggling to adjust to their new homes.

She might not have had the typical immigration experience, but Fort said she identified with those who could not adjust as easily to the area. "They come form Latin America," she said. "They are different. People need to understand that they may speak the same language, but they are not all the same."

But Fort said the academic climate of the University helped promote interest in foreign cultures and opened the possibility of taking courses and learning more. Fort said seeing young people everywhere made a difference. "They "They are more willing to help with direc-tions," she said. "They are always laugh-ing, smiling and there is a positive attraceptore." atmosphere

Fort's 20-year-old son, Prem, is a junior biology major at UNC, and she said he helped his family find out about Latin American events.

Although the University provided a stimulating and diverse environment, working with these local groups working with these local groups prompted Fort's realization that Chapel Hill still had a long way to go before becoming a totally accepting and under-standing community for immigrants. "People (don't) understand why we

immigrate," she said. "There are certain situations in peoples' countries so that people want their children to have a better life."

As a resident of Chapel Hill, Fort said her goal was to offer to the com-munity what she could, and she said she hoped that others would not hesitate to approach her. "People need to know more about

Hispanic heritage," she said. "They don't know much, and that's why they don't approach us to see how we are, what we are and how we think."

Fort said that even with all of the challenges she had faced, she did not regret her move to Chapel Hill.

There always exists certain obstacles, and a person has to go beyond them," she said.

"Challenges – I like challenges, and I like to know the culture. It is like you bring something to me and I bring something to you.

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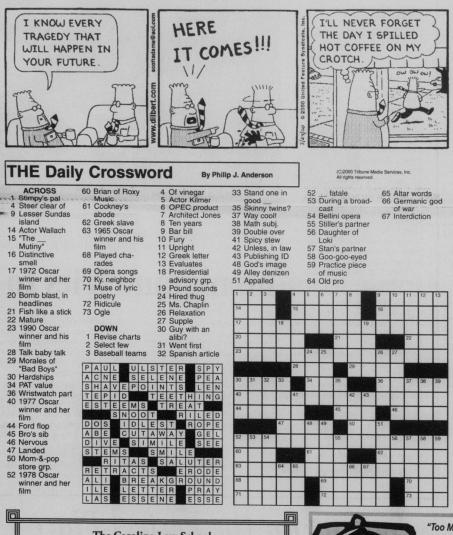
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whereabouts. "Everyone feels lost at the beginning," she said. "I didn't know ere to go to get information." wh For many immigrants, language can

work because she was not sure of her

also stand in the way of being informed in a new community But the Fort family did not find that



The Carolina Law School Welcomes the University community to hear Senator Paul Wellstone, UNC alumnus,

speak about leadership, public service,

a significant barrier. "My children were brought up in ing new arrivals was trying to learn the everyday procedures American resi-dents took for granted. "It was very hard to get along," she said. "When you don't

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w the procedures, you can't get the learned English at the oldest age. "Living in England, I couldn't com-She said she found it frustrating to navigate the area after her husband left

