

Triangle's Latino Population Grows, Builds Community

By RYAN CARON
Staff Writer

Marcio Antonio Sanchez is watching people dancing from the bar at El Chilango in Carrboro.

He comes to the restaurant every Friday night for cultural events like Latin dancing and bluegrass music night.

Sanchez came to Durham 15 years ago when a friend said he would be able to find a good job in the Triangle.

He is just one of many in a wave of Latino newcomers to North Carolina. U.S. Census information indicates that the Latino population in Orange County grew from 1,279 to 4,342 between 1990 and 2000 — a 239 percent increase.

North Carolina saw a 439.9 percent increase of Latinos in the past decade. The effects of this influx can be seen throughout the Triangle.

In Carrboro, where 12 percent of the population is Spanish-speaking, com-

munity officials have instigated a push for cultural and educational programs to help integrate the influx of almost 2,000 Latinos into the community.

Local service organizations also started El Centro Latino, a nonprofit resource center for Latinos.

"Report after report from the local Latino task force, Los Ninos and by Orange County said there was a need for such a center," said John Herrera, a newly elected Carrboro alderman who is the first first-generation Latino immigrant to hold a municipal government position in North Carolina.

"Everyday we get calls from social service agencies, the police, hospitals and individuals," Herrera said.

The Orange County Partnership for Young Children and other social service organizations like the United Way help fund El Centro Latino. "It's a grassroots organization because it acts on a daily basis with the local community," Herrera said. "Everyone from different levels — Hispanic clergy, local town and state and national government representatives all got involved."

The diverse Latino population, which immigrated from Peru, El Salvador and Costa Rica, can go to the center to find help in areas such as housing, employment and child and health care. At the beginning of September, the center hosted a health fair where doctors

from UNC Hospitals and the private sector administered various treatments.

Volunteers are an integral part of the center's success, said Executive Director Alex Asbun. "We are blessed to be in a community with such a large pool of ready volunteers," Asbun said.

In addition to various aid programs, volunteers help instruct English as a Second Language and Spanish classes that are offered to the public. "In order to really know another culture you need to know the language," Asbun said. "It's more than just a language but about discovering a culture and a history."

El Chilango also offers English and Spanish classes, taught by restaurant employee Ranulfo Franco.

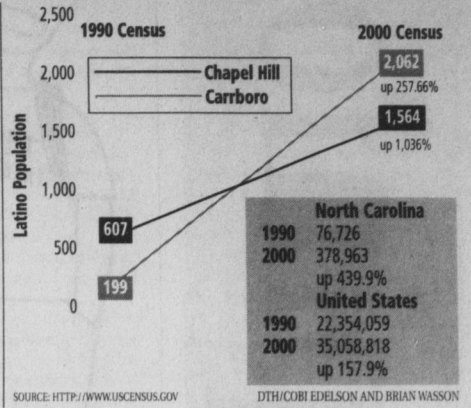
Saul Benegas is a participant in the programs at El Chilango and El Centro Latino. He goes to Latin dance classes Friday nights at the restaurant. At El Centro Latino he uses the day care, attends the free ESL classes and learns how to save money on health care.

"If you want to open the door for opportunity but don't know how to go about it, El Centro Latino helps open the door," said Banegas, who recently moved to Carrboro from Mexico.

"They can help you find clinics that don't charge as much or charge according to how much you make," Banegas also receives help in translating and completing job applications at the center.

Latino Population on the Rise

The Latino population in Carrboro and Chapel Hill has increased significantly in the last ten years. The influx of Spanish speakers has led town officials to create support programs for this segment of the community.



Another problem the Latino population faces, Herrera explained, is banking. He said a nationwide trend shows that more than 50 percent of Latino immigrants don't open bank accounts because of language and cultural barriers.

Herrera helped found the Latino Credit Union in Durham to break down those barriers. The first Latino-run institution in North Carolina, it was created to improve the banking situation for Latino families, he said.

The range of programs offered in the community not only aids Latinos but non-Latinos as well.

Franco explained that he teaches at El Chilango to help English and Spanish speakers understand and appreciate one another. "If Americans are helping me, then I want to help them."

Sofia Vallila contributed to this article. The Features Editor can be reached at features@unc.edu.



DTH/LAURA LITTLE

Fernando Villarreal, 2, learns from a bilingual computer program at the El Centro Latino day-care program in Carrboro.

PROTEST

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"The two wars that lost popular support (Vietnam and the Korean War) were long," he said.

"If the war drags on, accumulates a number of casualties — if the economy is affected and we have higher taxes then the war could lose support.

"Most of the public sees the bombing as the easy way to go. For the most part, American lives are not being lost as they were in Vietnam."

Allison Blakely, professor of European and comparative history at Boston University, also said length might be a deciding factor as to whether student protest movements gain more momentum.

"Vietnam had gradually built up as an issue in which the public could take sides," he said. "The public took September 11 personally as an attack on the U.S. and people they knew, and that is why so overwhelming a degree of the public was in favor of the war."

"But, if the war extends, if the draft gets re-enacted and if American casualties start mounting, as it did for Russian soldiers when they were in Afghanistan, that is when the public will begin to lose favor."

Blakely said a lack of knowledge among the general public about the war has been the main cause for the lack of student protests compared to Vietnam.

"The developments haven't been of the type that can generate a lot of student protest because the issues are so fuzzy," he said. "In Vietnam, students could articulate alternatives of what they wanted the government to do, but today, even people who are unhappy and uncertain about what is going on don't really have clear, concise alternatives."

But Anna Gonzalez, director of the cross-cultural center at the University of California-Irvine, attributes a lack of alternatives to reduced media coverage of protests on college campuses.

Gonzalez said the media is the force responsible for igniting responses in both the general public and college students.

But she added that she thinks a lack of media coverage of the war appears to trivialize student protests.

"The difference between the '60s and today isn't student apathy," Gonzalez said. "No, in the 1960s, the press was more inclined to take risks by covering this type of things. The media today tends to wear suits and feed off of information from the army."

Gonzalez also said it will be hard to predict whether students will continue to protest the war in Afghanistan because little is known of what is actually happening.

"There are parallels in every war," she said. "But with Vietnam and the current war, (what is happening) really isn't being explained to the people."

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New Law to Stiffen Penalty for Stealing Gas

By COLIN SUTKER
Staff Writer

Starting Dec. 1, those who forget the "pay" part of "pay-at-the-pump," will face harsher penalties.

But some local gas station employees are expressing mixed feelings about the effectiveness of newly beefed-up legislation.

A bill, which was signed into law by Gov. Mike Easley on Aug. 13, will make the penalty for stealing gasoline from a commercial entity a class 1 misdemeanor.

The bill also includes a provision that allows the Division of Motor Vehicles to take away the driver's license of an

offender for second and subsequent convictions.

This bill was initiated in February in response to the increase in the number of statewide drive-offs, said Sen. Kay Hagan, D-Guilford, who co-sponsored the bill along with 12 other state senators.

"With the rising price of gasoline (in Feb.), the gas owners noticed a large number of drive-offs," Hagan said.

"They felt this would be more of a threat if the punishment was higher."

Sen. Virginia Foxx, R-Watauga, who also co-sponsored the bill, said the law should effect the rate of drive-offs as the penalties are enforced.

"I hope that if they (steal gasoline),

that some people will be prosecuted and (the case) will get publicity," Foxx said. "It, then, will act as a deterrent to stealing gasoline."

Despite the steady drop in gasoline prices, Hagan said the ongoing economic slowdown could result in an increase in gasoline theft for a separate reason.

"The economy is not as good and a lot of people go and steal gas," Hagan said.

Although the penalties might be greater, some said this might not deter would-be offenders.

Gandhi Bilit, manager of Eagle Food Mart located at 11620 U.S. 15-501 in Chapel Hill, said the hardest part of

catching drive-off offenders is getting their license plate number.

Often the gas station attendant reports the number to the police, only to hear that the offenders' license plates are fake. "(The bill) might not be effective," Bilit said. "If you catch somebody, only then can you convict him."

Foxx added that gas stealing is especially harmful to smaller business owners.

"It's a terrible thing to do; they're hurting small business people," she said. "Most people think gas station owners make a lot of money. They think that they are ripping off rich people, but they're not."

But some area service station workers

said the local impact of the bill could be minimal.

Tommy Summy, a clerk at Walker's BP Service, located at 1500 E. Franklin St., said few drive-off incidents occur at his store during the year.

"They are few and far between," Summy said. "I don't remember one in the last couple months."

Despite the legislation, Bilit claimed that curbing gasoline theft might be outside the realm of the law.

"The problem remains that people drive off," Bilit continued. "There is no bill that can stop that."

The City Editor can be reached at citydesk@unc.edu.

Report Criticizes Universities' Responses to Attacks

By ALLISON LEWIS
Staff Writer

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni issued a report Nov. 11 that criticized the responses of universities nationwide to the Sept. 11 attacks.

The report, titled "Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done About It," states that the American academic community is irresponsible to offer views that counter mainstream opinions.

"College and university faculty have been the weak link in America's response to the attack," the report states.

The ACTA was founded in 1995 by Sen. Joseph Lieberman, D-Conn., and

Lynne Chaney, wife of Vice President Dick Chaney.

The organization's stated mission is to protect academic freedoms and maintain the free exchange of ideas on college campuses, according to the group's Web site.

The report admonishes universities nationwide for allowing events such as teach-ins and protests to continue. It criticizes these events as having one recurring theme: "Blame America First."

One of the article's central criticisms is that university communities might be silencing conservative students by supporting anti-war sentiments.

The report contains 117 numbered examples of liberal activities on college campuses or quotes from faculty mem-

bers. Twelve of the examples included occurred at UNC. Two UNC professors quoted in the report were mentioned because of their support of a recent series of campus teach-ins designed to explore alternatives to military action.

Catherine Lutz, a UNC anthropology professor who was quoted in the report, said she had not yet read the report and was not aware that she was quoted.

Lutz said she supported the teach-in activities. "This is an educational institution, and teach-ins are educational events."

Lutz said she has received some criticism for her views but not from within the UNC community.

Art Professor Elin O'Hara Slavick also was quoted in the ACTA report

regarding the teach-in. Slavick was quoted in the organization's report as saying, "We offer this teach-in as an alternative to the cries of war and as an end to the cycle of continued global violence."

Slavick said she was not surprised by the article's publication. "They have every right to say it," she said. "The University has held (many) events ... for me and people who support the war."

Slavick also was unaware she had been quoted in the report.

The ACTA report does support professors' rights to speak but remains critical of their message and intention.

Slavick also said UNC is organizing its fifth teach-in, titled "Enduring Freedoms: Civil and Immigrant Rights After Sept.

11." Slavick said the University should continue to act as a respectful forum for open social interaction from varied perspectives. "If it can't happen at a public university, we're in trouble."

The State & National Editor can be reached at stntdesk@unc.edu.

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