

LATINOS IN CENTRAL OREGON

A COMMUNITY PROFILE IN STATISTICS & STORIES

**Amiga-Vecina Profiles
with Introduction and Conclusion**



**LATINO COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION
OCTOBER 2020**



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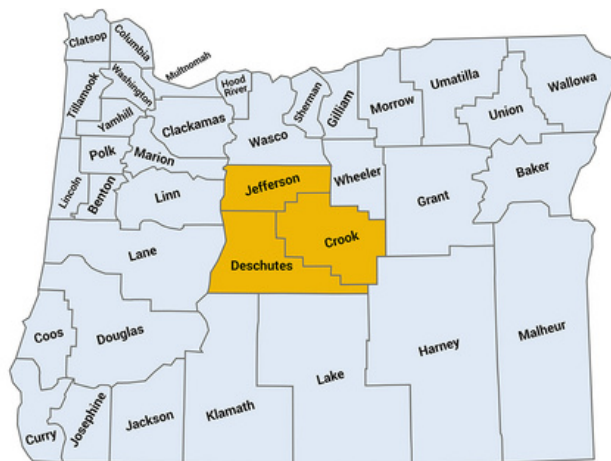
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INTRODUCTION

Webster’s Dictionary describes a baseline as “an initial set of critical observations or data used for comparison; a starting point.” This report is a beginning. It is our attempt to establish a baseline to understand where we are today and measure our progress moving forward. We want to know in which areas our Latino families in Central Oregon are doing well. But we also want to see where opportunities exist to achieve more. We want this report to be a catalyst for change: a tool to measure progress and guide our collective efforts to lower barriers that keep our Latino families from reaching their full potential.

Staff members and volunteers of the Latino Community Association (LCA), a nonprofit organization serving Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson counties in Central Oregon, assembled this report. We received research and review assistance from multiple community partners, to whom we are forever grateful.

We modeled our efforts on the 2016 report, *Latinos in Oregon: Trends and Opportunities in a Changing State*, produced by the Oregon Community Foundation in 2016. We have added the additional subject area of housing and included interviews with families in Bend, Redmond, Madras, Prineville, and surrounding areas. We hope readers find this profile of our Latino community to be informative, insightful and useful for considering programmatic and policy alternatives. Our priority is to ensure that our Latino families have equitable access to opportunities to advance and fully participate in the civic and cultural life that makes Central Oregon a desirable place to call home.



ELISA

BUSINESS OWNER, REDMOND

For Elisa (not her real name) and her family, moving to Bend in 2008 opened new opportunities for work, and ultimately, a family-run business. When they arrived in Deschutes County, the family, originally from Mexico, found jobs, sold food at a swap meet, and saved money to rent a commercial property. But rents were too high in Bend, so the family opened their business in Redmond about three years ago.



But they miss the lively vibe in Bend, where they lived for seven years, Elisa said. Redmond is quieter with fewer places for entertainment.

“People are friendlier here,” she said, compared with the southern California community where the family used to live. Personally, she has not experienced discrimination in Central Oregon, but knows other Latinos who have gotten a cold shoulder from white residents.

Elisa enjoys the natural setting in Redmond, but thinks the school system that educated her three children should be more rigorous. “There’s a lot of freedom here, but not as much focus on studying,” she said.

Only one of her children has pursued a college education and all three young adults work with their parents, Elisa said. The high cost of college is frustrating and so is the cost of medical care.

Because she is a business owner, Elisa can’t qualify for lower cost care and can’t afford private health insurance.

Her dream for her family is to someday gain legal status for everyone and the opportunity to buy a home.

LUIS ALBERTO ROBLES

WAITER, REDMOND

Luis Alberto Robles is an attorney and high school teacher from Mexico who served as mayor of his home town of Cuautla, Jalisco, from 2012 to 2015.

But because the town of some 2,500 people has few opportunities, most of his family has relocated to Redmond and Bend to work in the restaurant business, he said.



In 2014, Luis helped negotiate a sister city relationship between Cuautla and Redmond, “because I want to help my community,” he said.

Luis visited Central Oregon frequently, but since he moved to Redmond in 2017, the language barrier makes it difficult to pursue a career in community service, he said. For two semesters, he taught a Spanish-language GED preparation class for High Desert Educational Service District and enjoyed helping Latinos advance their education.

Now that class has moved to Central Oregon Community College. Luis enrolled in English classes through the Latino Community Association and waits on tables at Mazatlan Restaurant.

As a city, Redmond is “well-organized and secure, and has a vision for its growth,” Luis said. “People are friendly and there are jobs here.”

Because he lives with family members, Luis did not experience the frustration of finding housing in Redmond’s tight market, and he earns enough to live on, he said. But the culture in Central Oregon is a huge change for him.

“I have to face the problem of language and adapt to the rhythm of life here,” he said.

Luis hopes to study more about North American laws, language, culture, and social development, and perhaps teach Spanish to English speakers.

LORENA BARRERA

FARM WORKER, CULVER

Lorena Barrera enjoys working outdoors, even though her work in the fields is physically demanding, she said. “I like to see the plants growing.”



In late September, Lorena was harvesting potatoes and expected to finish her work season in October. Fortunately, her husband works most of the year, but the family is on a tighter budget through the winter, she said.

The couple bought a modest home in Culver for their family with three children, Lorena said. “We are trying to improve ourselves and have a better life.”

But they don’t earn enough to pay for the college education their daughter, Andrea, desires, Lorena said. The high school graduate excels in drama and wants to study theater at a college in southern California.

In 2019, the family visited the school. “It’s very expensive,” Lorena said.

Andrea volunteers with the Latino Community Association and helped with the food distribution in Madras this summer. She has applied for federal student aid. Currently she is working in the fields with her mother and saving her earnings.

“She is striving for her dream,” Lorena said.

A native of Michoacán, Mexico, she came to Los Angeles in 1996, but soon moved to Culver where her seven brothers worked in agriculture, she said. At first, she cared for their children, but then joined them in the carrot fields in 2000.

More Central Oregon growers are cultivating hemp, a lucrative crop, but Lorena doesn’t like the smell and the changes she thinks the crop will bring, she said. “It’s sad because the garlic is going away. Soon we won’t see vegetables, only hemp.”

Lorena treasures her family and likes to set up karaoke and sing her heart out with her family members.

ANTONIO

CONSTRUCTION & LANDSCAPE WORKER, REDMOND

Antonio (not his real name) has seen both the beautiful and ugly sides of Central Oregon. A native of Mexico, he lived in Los Angeles and then came to Redmond more than 10 years ago to join his brother, he said.



With his skills in construction and landscaping, Antonio finds short-term work with homeowners. He also volunteers with a nonprofit organization.

“The city is very clean. There are no problems with gangs.”

Antonio, Redmond resident

But he doesn't have a car and relies on a bicycle, so sometimes it's a challenge to get to the jobs, he said. He speaks with pride about the landscaping work he did on the playfields at Ridgeview High School and the trees he helped plant in Centennial Park.

“The city is very clean,” Antonio said about Redmond. “There are no problems with gangs.”

Once in a while he encounters an angry person who shouts at him, “Go back to Mexico!” But most white residents he meets treat him well, he said. His goals for the future include starting a family of his own.

BLANCA REYNOSO

OWNER OF REYNOSO JEWELRY, MADRAS



The sign indicates a jewelry store, but when you step inside Reynoso Jewelry, you see frilly dresses, shirts and sweatshirts hanging from the ceiling, clothing racks, and cupboards full of shoes. The jewelry counter occupies a corner near the front and customers often stop by to pay a utility bill or wire money to Mexico.

Blanca Reynoso and her husband, Israel Reynoso, opened their business in 1997, she said. “We started with a little bit of everything.”

A native of the state of Guerrero, Mexico, Blanca came to Madras from southern California in the 1980s and started second grade, she said. Her mother had family here and found work in agriculture.

When she was older, Blanca met her husband and, over the years, gave birth to four daughters. She never finished high school, because both had to work to support their growing family, but she earned her GED.

“Sometimes life isn’t fair, because we stopped studying and ended up with low salaries,” Blanca said. “Because of our poverty, we didn’t make it to college.”

Now Israel works in his own landscaping, construction, heating and cooling business while Blanca tends the store. Their two incomes allow them to give their daughters the education they missed. The two oldest daughters earned bachelor’s degrees, the third is studying for her master’s degree in psychology, and the youngest has just started high school, Blanca said with pride.

“My major goal is to finish putting my last daughter through school, something I wasn’t able to do,” she said. But she and her husband also want to build a food cart area on their property.

Because of their business income, Blanca and her husband earn too much for care under the Oregon Health Plan, but find that private health insurance is too expensive, she said. “We’re right in that middle.”

Blanca served on the Madras Chamber of Commerce board in the past, and currently serves on the Madras Redevelopment Commission. The No. 1 problem in her city is lack of housing, and the commission is looking into building homes on the outskirts of Madras, she said. “There are so many people who don’t have a place to live.”

ROBERTO IRICHE

WORKING STUDENT, PRINEVILLE

During summer 2019, working student Roberto Iriche logged almost 60 hours a week at a manufacturing company in Redmond. But in late September, he returned to his studies at Central Oregon Community College, carrying a load of 16 credits at campuses in Redmond and Bend.



Now his hard work has paid off. He was accepted to the Oregon Institute of Technology in Klamath Falls and began classes this fall.

Roberto was 11 when his family left Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico, to escape gang violence, and then joined his father who was already working in Prineville. A ranch owner provided a three-bedroom house for the family with a real back yard, Roberto said. He studied hard and graduated from Crook County High School in 2008.

He started college but could not get financial aid because he lacked a green (permanent resident) card. So he left to live and work in Portland for two years, and then tried living in Chicago and Palm Springs, Calif.

In 2015, Roberto obtained temporary residency and a work permit under DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), he said. That program, created by President Obama, is now in legal limbo. When he returned to the place he calls home – Prineville – Roberto qualified for a scholarship from COCC to study applied science in manufacturing technology.

Opportunities abound in that field, but he can't land any kind of federal job with his DACA permit, Roberto said. He hopes his studies will lead to a job that pays well for work he enjoys.

Roberto is devoted to outdoor life in Central Oregon, especially hiking, kayaking and paddle boarding. He also cares deeply about the community that nurtured him.

“Since the COVID-19 outbreak, I have noticed the lack of resources for people of color in my community,” he said. “I want to give back to the community, like the way people are helping me now.”

Roberto is intrigued with 3-D printer technology, especially with its ability to produce the components to build small affordable homes, he said. “If I get accepted to OIT, that’s going to be my senior project.”

MARIA TERESA MENDOZA
PARENT ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST
FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER, BEND



Maria Teresa Mendoza is a professional who helps families and their children take the first steps in their education. She has an associate's degree in Early Childhood Education. But as a child, she harvested crops along a migrant trail that took the family from Michoacán, Mexico, through California and up to Hood River and The Dalles, Oregon, each year.

As they followed tomatoes, cucumbers, strawberries and cherries, Maria Teresa enrolled in one school district after another. “It was very difficult (to stay on track in school),” she said.

Her father worked in the *bracero* program and brought his family to the U.S. legally when Maria Teresa was 5, she said. Eventually, they settled in Stockton, Calif., where they went on strike in the tomato fields for higher pay in the 1970s when she was 16. Union leader Cesar Chávez came to fast in support, she said. “We got what we wanted and two clean bathrooms (in the field).”

Maria Teresa married and moved to an avocado ranch in San Luis Obispo County, where the couple worked and raised two children. “We were in heaven,” she said about the 800-acre ranch on the central California coast that was home for 25 years.

The couple’s son graduated from college and moved to Bend to train as an ultra runner, Maria Teresa said. When they came to visit, “my husband fell in love with Bend,” she said. They moved here in 2013. He found work in RV sales and she went to work for the Family Access Network (FAN) through the High Desert Educational Service District.

Maria Teresa enjoys exploring trails, rivers and lakes, but the winter weather is difficult, she said. With their savings from the ranch, they bought a home in Bend and paid off the mortgage.

“We are so blessed,” she said. “I have found that life in Central Oregon is more difficult for Latino families and undocumented people,” harder for them to find work and housing than in California.

Schools here now have dual language programs, but struggle to recruit bilingual teachers, Maria Teresa said. She emphasized the partnership of family and school. “Parents need to be involved in education since kindergarten if they want their child to succeed.”

DELIA FELICIANO

COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE AGENT, BEND



In 2001, Principal Broker Delia Feliciano bought a one-way ticket to Portland to begin a new life. But she missed the food and culture of Puerto Rico, where she grew up, she said. Since then, she has connected with other Puerto Ricans in Oregon to cook, dance, speak Spanish, and celebrate their roots on the island.

Delia met her husband in Portland 12 years ago, where she worked as a legal assistant and later in commercial real estate investments. When he brought her to Sunriver to go snowmobiling, “I fell in love with Sunriver, and the smell of the pine trees got me,” she said. They returned frequently with his kids, and then moved to Bend in February 2015.

“I love the energy (here), a good energy from Mother Earth,” Delia said. “I find people from all different nations. They’re happy to be here and everyone is ready to step in to help the community in any way they can.”

But the cost of living is a challenge, said Delia, who owns a home in Bend.

“When the economy tanked in 2008, people were leaving because there were no jobs,” she said. Investors bought land when it was relatively cheap and produced a boom in construction. People from California discovered Central Oregon and paid cash for local homes.

“That’s driving prices up,” Delia said.

In Central Oregon, the rocky soil is hard to work, she said. “The cost of construction is going up because builders have to bring people from out of the area or pay higher wages,” Delia said. “It’s hard to find good, reliable workers willing to do the tough jobs in farming, construction and restaurants.”

When Delia’s sister moved to Central Oregon a couple of years ago, she needed health insurance, Delia said. A friend told her the Latino Community Association (LCA) offered that service. Eventually, her sister opened a food cart in Redmond called Taino, a Taste of Puerto Rico, but closed her business because she couldn’t find weekend help. Now her sister teaches Spanish classes while she prepares for her teacher license exam.

In 2019, Delia chaired the committee that organized LCA’s Gala de Oro fundraiser. Now, she is getting ready to launch a commercial real estate property management company, she said. Her other ambition is to teach health-conscious cooking to her neighbors in Central Oregon.

CONCLUSION

Collecting and organizing data to describe our Latino community in Central Oregon, and analyzing it to gain insights about how and where our families are excelling or struggling, has opened our eyes. The data makes visible what otherwise often goes unseen by anyone not specifically focused on the well-being of our Latino families.

We want all families in Central Oregon to thrive, but experience tells us that a majority-white community can unintentionally overlook the specific needs and opportunities of our immigrant families and children when it comes to service delivery, employment practices, outreach and civic engagement. Equity requires understanding.

We hope that this report will provide a solid baseline for stakeholders to evaluate your practices to ensure that our Latino families, especially recent immigrant families, are neither excluded nor underserved. If you are currently unable to track the effectiveness of your efforts based on ethnicity and immigration status, we hope you will begin doing so for all marginalized groups. We cannot evaluate or remedy what we cannot see.

This report is a beginning. Our hope is that this report will help start discussions and inform ongoing efforts to plan for the well-being, equity and inclusion of all Central Oregonians. Our immigrant community members and our mixed-status families (U.S. citizens and non-citizens) represent an enormous resource to help fuel the economy and culture we all share. Yet, for decades, we have carried the burdens of discrimination, disdain, and invisibility.

If nothing else, this report makes perfectly clear that Latinos are needed for Central Oregon to thrive. We are young. We are motivated. But we are also stunted by the mainstream community's reluctance to fully include us and help break down the walls that slow our progress.

We call on the business leaders, faith leaders, and other decision-makers and influencers in our communities to embrace and include us, recognize our contributions and invest in our potential. Equity requires action.

We welcome you to know us, understand our diverse cultures, our challenges and dreams, and join us in working for an equitable and inclusive Central Oregon we can all be proud of.