

# New Community

## County's Latinos See Things Start To Come Together

by Chela Zabin

**L**UCY Trujillo, director of the Familia Center in Beach Flats, is late for a meeting with the Santa Cruz Community Housing Corp. So I close my notebook, mumble a quick goodbye and head out to my car. A door is open to one of the battered bungalows across Raymond Street, and as I roll down my window, I catch a refrain that's become almost too familiar: "*Para bailar la Bamba, para bailar la Bamba, se necesita una poca de gracia.*"

As I pull away from the curb, I'm thinking that Luis Valdez' success with "La Bamba" is like a cultural smoke signal: a visible, tangible communication. We can enjoy the message, but how much do we know about the fire it came from, the Latin community, here in Santa Cruz County?

What we do know is that the Latin community is growing in size and influence. Palo Alto-based Center for Continuing Study on the California Economy estimates that Santa Cruz County is home to 17,100 Hispanics. Population estimates do not include the thousands of people here illegally.

In south county, Hispanics make up slightly less than half of the total population and spend about half of the local dollars. North county has a significant number of Hispanic residents as well, and the Santa Cruz Immigration Project has seen enough new immigrants to establish information clinics in Santa Cruz and Davenport.

Hispanics will comprise 23 percent of California's total population by 1990, and 27 percent by the year 2000, according to Mary Heim of the State Department of Finance's population research unit.

The local Latin community has seen a lot of change in the last year or two. A successful 18-month long strike brought by predominantly Latin and female cannery workers against Watsonville Canning and Frozen Food Co.; the election of Watsonville's first Hispanic city councilmember, Tony Campos; and the new immigration law are a few of the recent events that have affected Latinos in Santa Cruz.

Some see a change in the community as a whole, the rumbling of a new political and social involvement. Celia Organista, president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, Parajo Valley Chapter, is one.

"I see more people involved. I see more Mexicans involved. It's still a very quiet involvement, but it's there. It's kind of like an earthquake. How does an earthquake happen? Is it just 'boom'? Or is there a buildup of something before? That's what I'm seeing. Little groups getting involved here and there."

Others see changes in economic opportunities for Hispanics, especially as Watsonville develops. Councilmember Campos has helped to create the Hispanic Affairs Committee, a branch of the Watsonville Chamber of Commerce designed to bring Latino businesses into the predominantly Anglo chamber.

"We're taking giant steps and leaps forward," said Campos. "Forty-five people showed up at our first meeting, and 60 came to our second one."

Lucy Trujillo says that in Beach Flats, the changes are smaller and more individual. "Here there's a woman who never had a phone before who learned how to use one. Another woman just learned to drive a car. This one across the street has a son who's going to college. Parks and Rec has finally started work on the park in back of the center, and the whole community is excited. These things are small, but they add up."

A radio somewhere on Leibrandt Avenue is playing as I leave the Flats. The song continues: "*una poca de gracia, para mi, para ti, Y arriba, arriba.*" Heading home on West Cliff, I think about the lyrics. To dance la Bamba, one needs a little grace, a little grace for me and for you. ...

### A Renewed Community

All of the 25 people I've interviewed in the last two weeks agree that more change is needed, and all but a few believe change is on the way.

Perhaps most significantly, they report a renewed sense of community: a coming together of the diverse groups that make up the Latin community — Mexicans, Latin Americans, Chicanos, fieldworkers, business people, professional people, longtime residents and new immigrants.

"I think 'La Bamba' is interesting," said Cruz Gomez, director of the Migrant Media Education Project, a community advocacy organization in Watsonville. "The song 'La Bamba' is very, very indigenous to Veracruz, real deep down and historical, so we see and feel that historic connection to the Chicano now."

"We need to preserve our culture and our sense of family and community. Some people will say: 'Community? Latinos are not united.' But we are. And I think that we proved it in the strike. The strike definitely brought the community together. I think people are realizing that there's a potential here, and something can happen. I see more people trying to learn about the political system. I see

more people involved in community organizations."

"The strike really changed Watsonville," said Margarita Martinez, a Teamster's Union member and worker at Norcal. "Watsonville's not the same. People are more involved in standing up for their rights. People are more united, we help each other more. We feel more close after what we went through."

The strike changed Martinez in a personal way as well, she said. Although she has been a union member for 17 years, she only became active during the strike, as a strike committee member. She's remained involved in the union, going to Teamsters conventions and learning about organizing and public speaking. She's planning to increase those

skills by enrolling in English as a second language, reading and math classes at Cabrillo College.

"A lot of my friends are going to take classes there. We're all going to go together and help each other out. You know, the kids are going to be growing up and needing help with their homework. I learned the hard way how important education is. That's why I went on strike. I thought about the kids — what about their future?"

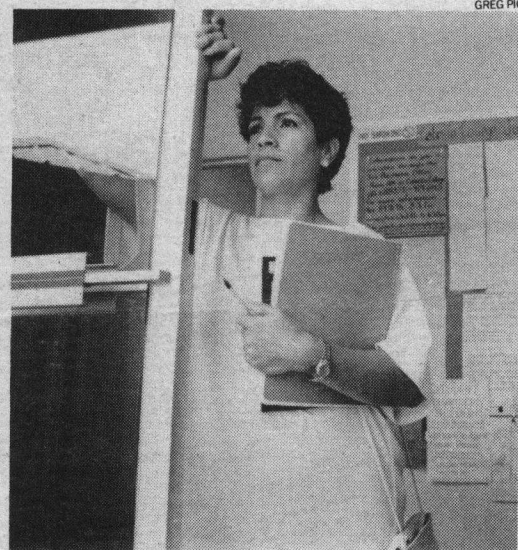
"Some of our ladies surprised everyone with the way they behaved during the strike and the way they've become involved in different community organizations now. I think more people are registered to vote,

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**Watsonville City Councilman Tony Campos (right) with D'La Comena owner Manuel Gonzales. Campos wants to make sure Latinos get recognition for their contributions to the community.**

**Cannery Worker Margarita Martinez at Cabrillo College's new Watsonville location: Her union involvement during the strike was the catalyst for personal change.**





## Cover Story

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and more of our people are running. It's good but we need more. And I think in a short time we are going to have a couple more in city offices," she said.

### The Whole Picture

"I think it's been a lot of things that increased our participation," said Organista. "I think that the strike hurt a lot of people — the strikers, the business people, the whole community — and because of that, more people are looking at the whole picture.

"We kind of tend to, as humans, isolate ourselves. Then something like the strike, which was a real heavy thing for this community, happens. A lot of people start questioning things. I think it's made us more aware and more responsible about what happens in our community," she said.

Others downplay the strike's significance. Instead, they point to the changes in Watsonville and the growing Hispanic involvement and influence there. They emphasize the importance of Anglos and Latinos working together on the development of Watsonville.

"There's always been lots of community involvement in the Mexican community, participation on a large scale, but it's been low key, low profile. We're often mavericks," said Campos. "We've been making real strides for awhile in a quiet manner.

"We set up the Hispanic Affairs

Committee to help bring the Mexican business community together and bring them into the inner workings of the chamber, so they can get the benefits and the expertise of other people, and so that we can all get the benefits of working together.

### Financial Recognition

"I think it's important that we all know who they are, and what they do, and that people get the recognition they deserve for being in the leadership roles they are in private enterprise," Campos said.

"They've already contributed a lot to the businesses in our community," said Scott Johnson, president of the Watsonville chamber. "We hope to contribute something back. Probably half the money that's spent in Watsonville comes out of the Hispanic community. Hispanics are spending a ton of money here in both Anglo and Hispanic businesses.

"We're also really noticing a change here. There's a growing feeling of community. And that community feeling exists for Hispanics, too, where they don't feel that there's a ghetto they live in and that they shouldn't buy in certain places," Johnson added.

"The Farmer's Market is a very good example of how the community feels about itself. There's nobody paying attention to what the ethnic mix is. We're all down there having the same good time. That is, from the chamber's perspective, what we'd wanted to achieve."

**'I think we'll be seeing a new type of Latino movement. We're more sophisticated, more educated, more international.'**

### Beyond Racial

"The Farmer's Market and the Watsonville Days are really significant in helping to create a community feeling," said Luis De La Cruz, a principal at Calabasas School in Watsonville. "That's been really important for the community. It brings people together and makes us look at ourselves as one community.

"I think we could eliminate a lot of problems if we start to think of ourselves that way. There's been a lot of changes in the past regarding racism and prejudice in this country. But it's always been open arms for me in the city of Watsonville," De La Cruz said.

"I think Tony's being elected was very significant," the principal said. "Some people said it was a shoo-in. It was no shoo-in. He worked very hard and he had broad support, not just from Latinos, but across the board. The election got more Latinos politically active."

"I don't have any issues as far as race," said Richard Galvan, whose family has grown Brussels sprouts and strawberries in Watsonville and Monterey for 47 years. "The issues I'm concerned with are farming issues, development issues.

"Most of the people I was raised with and went to school with think along the same lines I do, that hey, we're all Americans. Sure people might have come from wherever, even if they're from Mexico, they could be from just about anywhere, because Mexico is a melting pot, too.

"I know it takes time for people to get adjusted. Some people don't get adjusted, some don't want to get adjusted. That's their choice. I'm proud of my heritage, but I want to be known as an American."

**I**F the last few years have brought change to the Latin community, not all the changes have been positive. Funds for bilingual education have been reduced, voters passed an English-only initiative and services for low-income people and minorities have been cut back.

The new immigration law offers a chance for some to become citizens, but others can't produce the required

documents, can't afford the process costs and have difficulty wading through the necessary paperwork. Some people believe that in critical areas, change has been too slow.

"Today we have Los Lobos, 'La Bamba,' I mean we have token realities," said Beatriz Lopez-Flores, director of the Women's Center at UCSC, "but it's been almost 20 years (since the beginning of the Chicano movement), and things should have improved more than they have."

Lopez-Flores is particularly concerned with what she sees as UCSC's inability to attract a sizable portion of the Hispanic population:

"The bottom line for Latinos is education. If you don't have education, in the broadest sense, you don't have anything. And there's no reason why, with the large numbers of Latin students graduating from Watsonville High, that we don't get at least 50 students from there each year."

(In 1986, the university had 10 Latino students who had come directly from Watsonville High School, and another six who had come to the university as transfer students, according to UCSC's Roberto Garcia, who works with recruitment for Watsonville.)

### Staying In School

For a large number of students, even getting through high school is difficult. The dropout rate for Latino high school students in Santa Cruz County is 14 percent, significantly higher than the overall dropout rate of 9 percent. For the '85-'86 school year Latinos were 35 percent of all Santa Cruz High School dropouts, according to Richard Diaz in the CBEDS unit of the Department of Education in Sacramento.

"The dropout rate for Latino high school students is still really high," said De La Cruz, "but I think the district is taking the issue in hand. One of the things we're doing is paying more attention to the number of days students miss, sending letters to the parents right away and trying to work more closely with them."

Lopez-Flores thinks that a greater commitment to recruiting and retaining minority students is needed and that part of that includes the hiring of more minority faculty members: "At UCSC, we have a really good record with male minority students in biology, in the sciences. Why? Because there's four Chicanos, there's one black and an American Indian teaching. Role models are extremely important."

(As of July, 1987, the UCSC biology department boasts three Chicanos, one Asian, an American Indian — all males — and four white women, according to Albert Hatcher, affirmative action compliance coordinator at UCSC.)

### Good for All

"It's important not just for Latinos but for the university and society as a whole. If the projections are right and Latinos are going to become an even larger population and we are not going on to college, it's going to have an impact on everyone. The university has to see that it has a stake in it as well — it must become responsive to the community it serves," she said.

For Trujillo and Gomez, who work directly with the most needy of the Latin community, the most

important issues are the basics: help with the immigration process, employment, housing and health care.

"I think we've made a great deal of change in the way immigration deals with the community," said Gomez. The Migrant Media Education Project was instrumental in setting up an immigration task force, headed by U.S. Rep. Leon Panetta, to improve relations between the community and the INS, (see related story, page 9) and has assisted other groups in providing free immigration services.

Familia Center works with the city, county and other community groups to press for affordable housing, education, child care and jobs. A large part of Familia's role is acting as a go-between between the community and other organizations, helping neighborhood people make use of what's available for them. The Center has a medical clinic every Wednesday, holds classes and organizes community cultural events.

"We're looking into setting up a small child care center here," said Trujillo. "There isn't any child care facility in this area. We could take maybe 10 — 10 safe children would be better than none. We think it's really important for women to be able to get to night ESL classes, for example, but how can they do that if they have small children?"

"Jobs and housing are the main issues," said Manuel Gonzales, owner of D'la Comena, a grocery store in downtown Watsonville. "People want to work. I wish you could see how many applications I have on my desk right now. More development in Watsonville might help, but only if homes are built as well as businesses. Right now people are living in make-shift houses and garages. We give away a lot of food, especially to older people and kids, and these aren't recent immigrants."

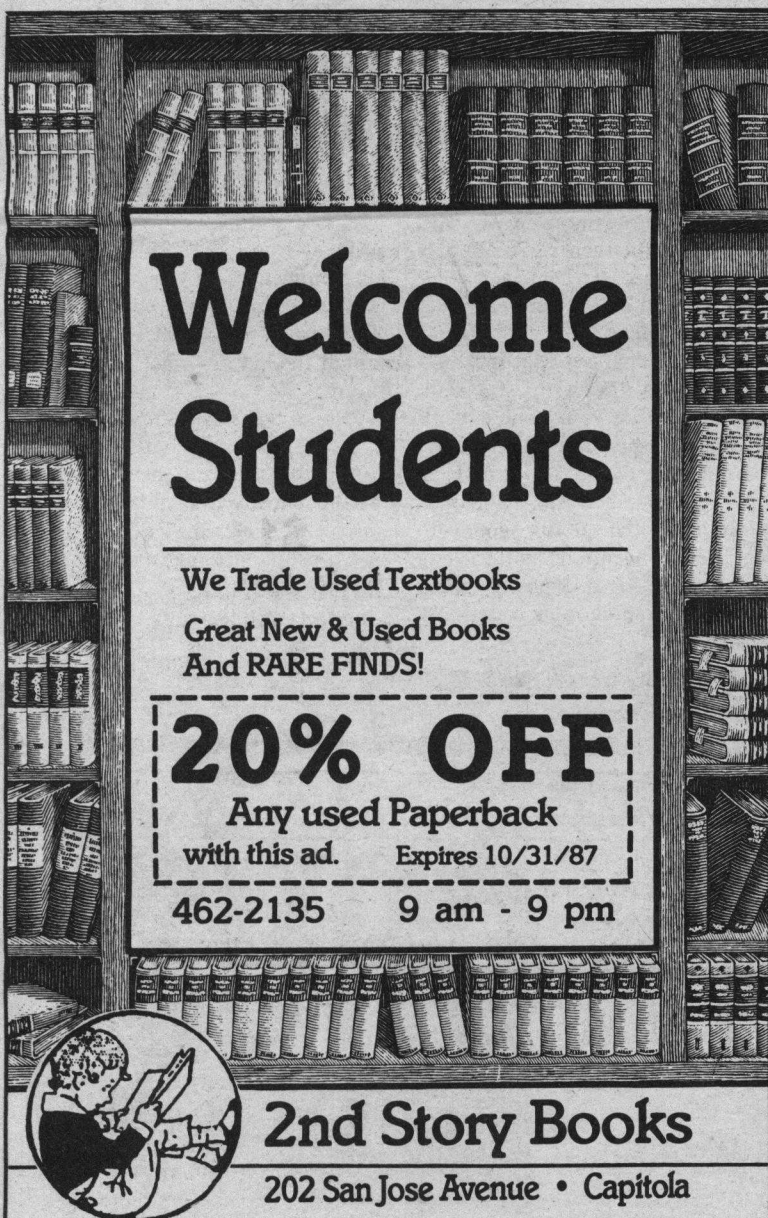
### More Hope, More Leaders

Despite the reality of slow change, Lopez-Flores thinks there's more hope in the Latin community as a whole: "In the barrios there're kids who see Los Lobos, I mean have you seen their pictures? They're rich, but they still look like homeboys and there's just more hope. I mean in the '60s and '70s we had a lot of hope, but we also had only one leader, Cesar Chavez. I think we have more people to call upon now.

"I think we'll be seeing a new type of Latino movement. It'll be different from the Chicano movement of the '70s. We're more sophisticated, more educated, more international. The new movement will come out of the urban areas and will include yuppies and professional people and more women in leadership roles," said Lopez-Flores.

"Although sometimes I don't agree with him, when I read interviews with Luis Valdez, I feel we have made gains. I majored in film, and I know I'm not supposed to like sentimental films like 'La Bamba,' but when I saw the movie, it just made me feel good."

**Next week:  
Latinos in the Arts**



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