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usually in the Strip or in Shadyside restaurants. "Suddenly, they are popping up everywhere."

In 1993, he was laid off as a project engineer for a construction company. So far from home and committed to a rooted family, he says, "you sink or swim."

With emotional support from Rodriguez and Vasquez, their fledgling business association became a network that was as much social as anything. Others joined, but as their businesses took off, they didn't need the benefits of each others' contacts and found less time to devote to the chamber.

Today, the chamber's 23 members include PNC Bank, the Port Authority and People's Natural Gas, companies the chamber helps recruit Latino employees and helps make contacts for business in Latin America. Its president and vice president are not Latinos, which worries a few members who are. But one chamber goal for greater efficacy is to strengthen its ties to the advocates of Latino culture, namely LACU. Rob Jones, the chamber vice president and a manager at Consolidated Natural Gas, says he wants a neon sign at the entrance to the Fort Pitt Tunnel that reads "Bienvenidos!" — "Welcome" — in Spanish.

The chamber's impetus to plan a new future is based in part, says Rodriguez, "on who we are." A survey he took of Latino households several years ago showed that they were almost $20,000 richer than the average $45,000-a-year in Pittsburgh. Lately, it has become clear that "who we are" is increasingly the troubled and invisible Latino.

One day in May, a Mexican family called the chamber. They may have been referred by police.

The family's son had been in Pittsburgh, undocumented, perhaps working in food service. He and three other young Mexican men got into an argument one weekend night in Bloomfield and one pulled a gun. The son and another of the men were killed. The family couldn't afford to fly the son's body to Mexico and asked the chamber for help.

To Rodriguez, this was an example of there being too few services for Latinos.

Another call not long ago further confirmed his opinion. A restaurant owner called the chamber to report that some antagonists outside a bar spotted an employee of his walking to work. The man was obviously ethnic, in fact a Mexican, said Rodriguez, "and they beat the hell out of him."

The restaurant owner asked Rodriguez what he should do. "I said 'Take him to the damn hospital.'" But the owner, who claimed he didn't know his worker was undocumented, was afraid of being fined by the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

The INS reports the undocumented population is up. A 1996 report of an estimated 37,000 statewide did not specify countries of origin. George Hess, officer in charge of the INS office in Pittsburgh, says, "It is my perception that we have more illegal Mexican nationals working in the area." The most common workplaces, he said, are Chinese restaurants, construction sites, in landscaping and agriculture. But when people call INS to report seeing illegal Mexicans in these jobs, he asks them, "How do you know they're not legal?"

Legal non-citizens carry any of several documents. For the past several years, all green cards need to be renewed, with updated photos. Work and tourist visas are granted for various lengths of stay. People can qualify for immigrant status through established family or an employer-advocate. Another class, refugees, can get a green card after a year.

Most large cities' Latinos were laborers first and foremost. In Chicago it was railroads, in Los Angeles, agriculture, and in New York, waves of Puerto Ricans sought opportunities after World War II. Pittsburgh never lured large numbers. Steel mills were filled with European émigrés.

Southeastern Pennsylvania attracted many Latinos to the mushroom industry, and northeastern cities have experienced run-off from New York and New Jersey. The earliest groups of Latinos in Western Pennsylvania were Puerto Rican grape pickers around Erie and the hundreds of Mexican men the railroads would load up and haul north for breaking strikes.

The U.S. Census Bureau has staff in the field to improve on the 1990 count. But furtive Latinos will need convincing that being counted doesn't mean being found out. Beyond one's name, details on a census form are sealed for 72 years. Being counted is a record of proof of residence in case of future naturalization. A true count also will help the Latino population get all the federal moneys and services due them.

The U.S. Census Bureau, in a follow-up to the 1990 census, estimated that it missed counting 5.5 percent of the state's Latinos.

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Crimes like the ones reported to the Hispanic chamber are less common than crimes Latinos are committing. The Department of Corrections reports that of 36,523 prisoners in the state system, 4,346 are Latinos. At 11.9 percent, that's more than double the percentage of the state's Latino population.

Jamil Assaf-Bautista, a management consultant in Philadelphia, is researching a book on the subject. His interviews indicate that one-third of the state's population behind bars is Latino. And while many Latinos inhabit what he calls "a failure environment," he believes police have "a visual fixation" against types and would be more inclined to haul in a Latino for a minor offense than "an Anglo in a Volvo."

"I'm not making excuses, I want a solution," he says, citing high-school drop-out rates: In Philadelphia, for instance, the rate is 71 percent. The national average for Latinos is 65 percent. "At the rate we are going, our people are helping to fill a lucrative prison industry."

Drop-out rates are not Pittsburgh problems; the city's public school system doesn't signify ethnic categories for drop-outs, and of 40,000 children in city schools, just 164 at most recent count, in '98, were Latino. Crime also doesn't rate a problem, say police, but advocates here are concerned about the local incarcerations of Latinos.

Sergio Pinto, a native Guatemalan, once used his Spanish for children on "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood." Most recently, he has been using his Spanish in the Allegheny County jails and in court, for the federal public defender's office.

"Not all Latinos are dancing at Cozumel," says Pinto, whose full-time work is running the 31-language Multinational Translation Services, with offices here and in Washington, D.C.

"The Hispanic jail population is growing," he said, adding that the majority of his clients are in for drugs and shoplifting. Without language intervention, many would move through the system not understanding a word being said. "In cities with more Latinos, there are more instruments of support for the ones in need," he said. "The Latinos in need here are invisible."

It took numerous phone calls to the Allegheny County Jail to get no call backs or information about the numbers of Latinos processed in recent years. Shelley Stark, chief of the federal public defender's office, said the numbers of Latinos in the federal system has not seemed inordinately high. But she said, "I have heard horror stories about people sitting in jail for months."

Pinto and other advocates speculate on the comparative disadvantages of being a Latino in a traffic stop, but the Pittsburgh Police Department is trying to counter criticism. It runs an outreach program, with help and oversight from the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

Sgt. Lavonnie Bickerstaff has both recruited employees and led cultural diversity classes for Chief Robert McNeilly. She says, the department employs at least five Latino officers and several non-Latinos who speak Spanish: "The criminal element is quite small, but we have seen an increasing number of Latino surnames on reports," as victims of universal kinds of crime, such as car and house burglaries and stolen property, she said.

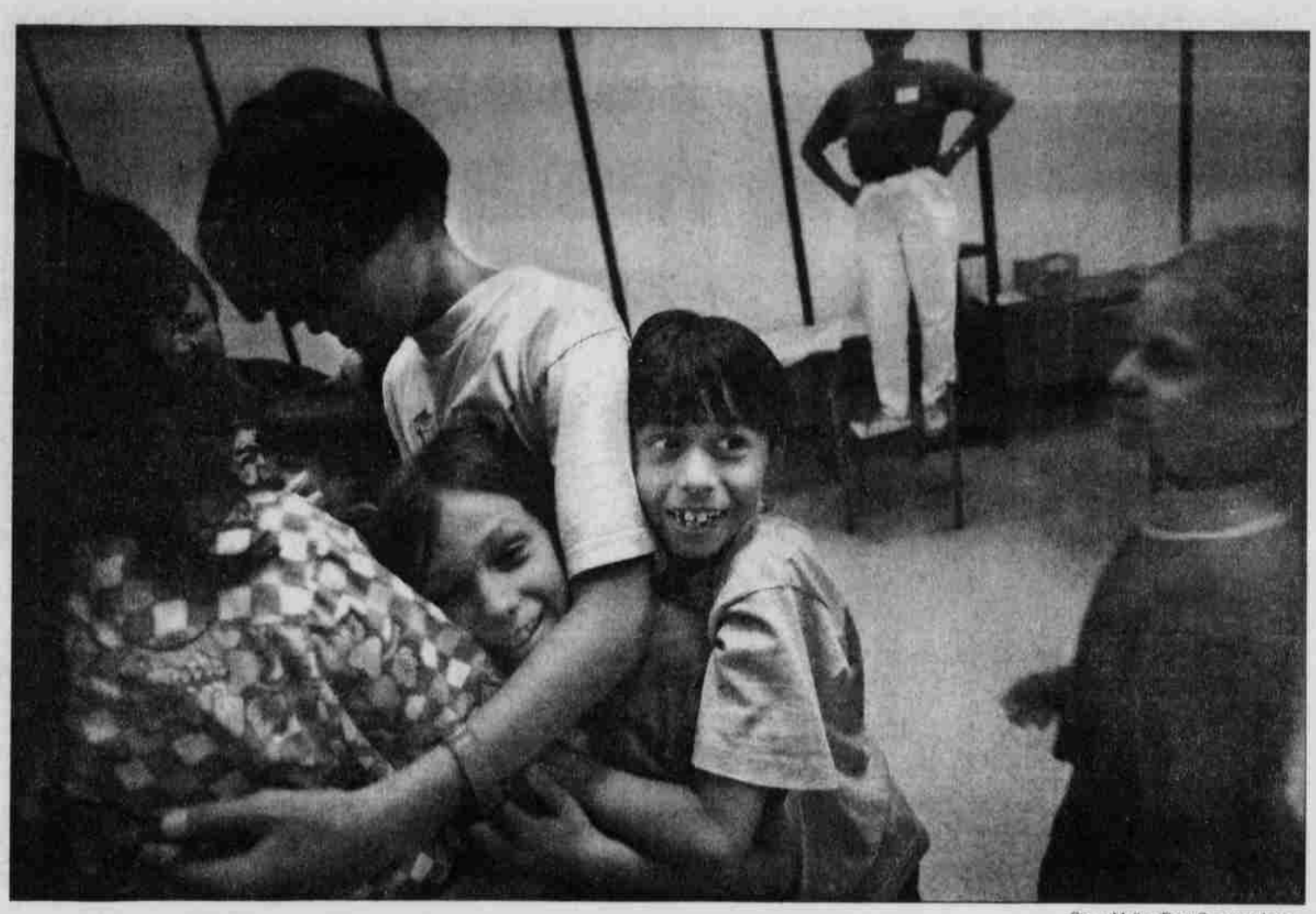
One Pittsburgh agency has already started an outreach effort, largely to help families avoid problems that lead to family breakdowns. Family Resources, based in East Liberty, created a Latin-American Family Outreach service last year with a grant from the Allegheny County Mental Health Department. The grant was renewed this year for $30,702.

Salomé Servian leads the outreach, which has advised "hundreds of families and worked with about 50." With her focus on preventing domestic abuse, she deals with universal Latino issues, including the stress of culture shock, language limitations and feelings of isolation.

Servian, of Paraguay, advertises the service by appearing at festivals and at the Spanish Mass on Sundays. "We need more Spanish-speaking volunteers because we are looking at more need. The population is definitely growing.

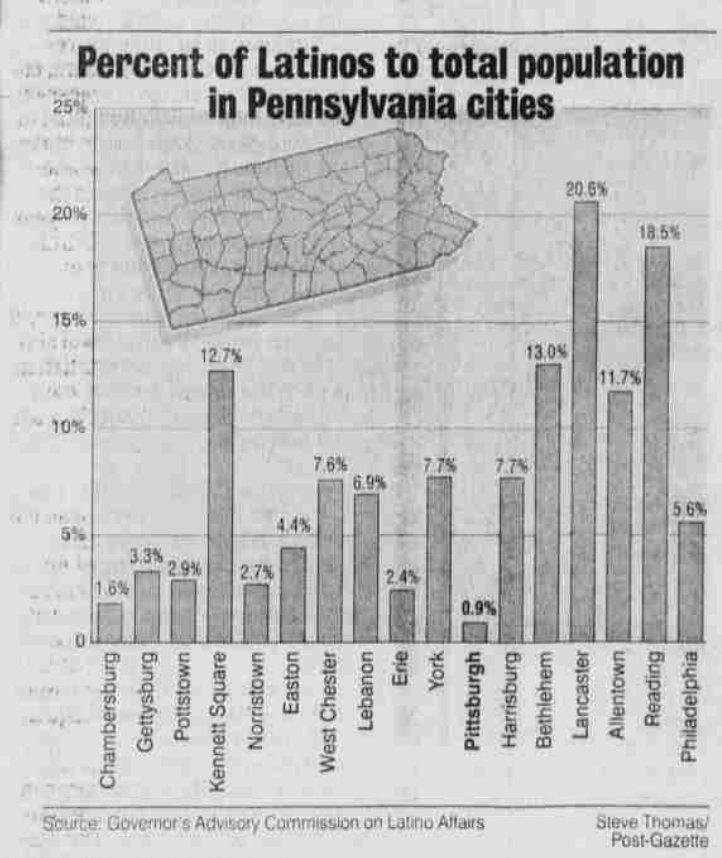
"I know this, because at our agency picnic, you wouldn't believe all the children."

Diana Nelson Jones is a Post-Gazette staff writer.



Steve Mellon/Post-Gazette photos

Children participating in a workshop play a game similar to musical chairs under the direction of Patricia Documet (standing on chair) of the Latin American Cultural Union. The workshop, in a room donated by a nonprofit agency in Oakland, was to build a *retablo*, an assimilated version of a portable shrine that Catholic missionaries in 16th century Peru carried from village to village to convert the indigenous people. Participants in the project include, from left, Jose Bernardo, 13 (tallest child), Rena Correal, 10, Diego Bernardo, 9, and Kitty Correal, 11.



Source: Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs

Steve Thomas/ Post-Gazette

Ken Rodriguez, who runs an international trade company on the North Side, co-founded the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in 1995, hoping to help Latino businessmen make contacts and network. The chamber now is planning a future based on the changing needs of Latinos in Pittsburgh.

Local resources

- Latin American Cultural Union: 412-361-7633
- Hispanic Chamber of Commerce: 412-201-9140
- Latin American Family Outreach/Family Resources: 412-363-5742
- Latin American Children's Fund: 724-834-4346
- Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs: 800-233-1407

Two-week-old Katherine Sanchez is surrounded by family in their Washington County home. From left are: grandfather Jesse Sanchez, aunt Mayra Sanchez, father Fernando Sanchez, mother Amalia Andrade, grandmother Alicia Sanchez and Manuel Ortega, Amalia's son.

In search of the Latino American dream

The daughter of Fernando Sanchez is one of the newest arrivals on Western Pennsylvania's Latino scene. Katherine Sanchez was born earlier in September and is the third generation living together five minutes from Trax Farms in Canonsburg.

In 1972, Fernando Sanchez was hit in the eye playing baseball with other boys in his Mexican village. A doctor there referred him to Children's Hospital for treatment. Several complications later, with the whole family hovering over the boy, Sanchez's father began working for Simmons Farms, then later at Trax.

After the hospital, Fernando continued his adventure here as a misplaced schoolboy: "They put me in a second-grade class. I had been in seventh grade in Mexico. All those little kids and me, it was terrible." A teacher advocated his moving up, but when he appeared on the scene of his peers, he had an instant reputation: "I was Latino, so they thought I was like in a gang. I am not tough, but everyone wanted to fight with me."

He graduated from Trinity High School in Washington. "People tell me I should go to college, but I am not a student."

Sanchez's parents, one of his sisters and he all work at Trax Farms year round. He is the nursery supervisor.

Large local farms have for decades hired Latinos, enough for farm-to-farm soccer games among workers. The Sanchez family lives in shared quarters.

Before fatherhood, Sanchez played soccer with other farm workers and drove into Pittsburgh for nights of dancing to Latin music: "I used to go to Cozumel on Saturday nights. There were so many people there, 200, 300. I would even meet people from the same state in Mexico that I'm from. Everybody spoke Spanish. You almost had the feeling that you were back in Mexico."

— Diana Nelson Jones

"There are so many reasons why Latino people arrive and stay in Pittsburgh. I was married here, divorced here and could have left, but I wasn't ready and didn't want to take these roots away from my children. And I wanted to spread my wings. I wanted to do something with music. Now, every time I get on a stage and look out, I see new [Latino] faces."

— Jackie Rodriguez of Carnegie, Puerto Rican native and lead singer with Latin Impulse, the band that played for the Roberto Clemente Bridge dedication in April

"At first, it was lonely hearing no Spanish, but I had to learn English. I told myself that when I understood Johnny Carson, when I understood his humor, because he was very American, then I would be capable enough with English to begin seeking out other Spanish speakers. If I met one a month it was impressive, but I was in Gabriel's one day recently and I met a Colombian woman, a Mexican woman and her son and eight young guys in their 20s from Mexico."

— Lupita Telep of Mt. Lebanon, native of Mexico and US Airways flight attendant

"When I came here, I came for something. I wanted to grow. In '94, my husband and I were in L.A. He was selling vegetables. My brother called us from Pittsburgh. He said, 'This is a very nice place. You can have more chance. You can grow here.' My husband got a job in a Japanese restaurant. They paid $25 for two weeks. I said, 'Oh, my God, this is America?' Now he's a restaurant manager."

— Rubí Cortes of the South Side, a native of Mexico who operates her own house-cleaning business

"I am amazed at how the Latino population has grown here. In all areas. I always wondered who was listening to our show and assumed it was students and professionals. But we offer tickets to give away, and most of our callers work in restaurants, in construction. As soon as I knew that, I decided to change things to interest them more.

— Martha Mantilla of Squirrel Hill, a native of Colombia, Pitt doctoral student and voice of WRCT-FM 88.3's Latin radio hour.

"When I came here, terrorism in my country was so bad. People were being kidnapped and many friends of my kids were killed. I didn't want to be a good citizen with my kids dead. Now, all my family is here. I sold in my country every business I owned and started here from scratch."

— Nelson Cano Sr. of Forest Hills, a Peruvian native who, with his son, owns and operates ADM Solutions, a North Side company that manages corporate documents through specialty imaging

"My daughter came home from second grade one day and said, 'I will never speak Spanish again.' I said, 'Why?' and she said, 'Because the kids call me "Spanish girl." ' And I said, 'Did you say thank you?' "

— Florencia Mediate of Greensburg, native of El Salvador and founder of the Latin-American Children's Fund