



Executive Memo

To: Jessica Sotello, Executive Director, Partners for Prosperity
From: Sonia Martinez, Community Development Specialist, Partners for Prosperity
Date: March 8, 2005
Re: Latino Community

According to Census 2000 the number of Hispanics in Idaho grew by 94%. Eastern Idaho ranks third largest in Latino population. Eastern Idaho is also listed as having the highest number of households in poverty and of those, Bingham County has the distinction of having the most people living in poverty in the State, 14% percent. Among the poorest are the Latino families with only seasonal employment and few jobs. The largest employers for Latinos are the potato processing plants and local farms where the wages start at \$5.15 to \$6.50 per hour.

On the plus side, Latinos have been doing well as entrepreneurs. We have many families who have chosen self-employment, operating small businesses with remarkable success, given the few tools available to them. However, for those who choose to go into business for themselves, it is a very challenging endeavor. Many of these entrepreneurs lack the knowledge of how to run a business in the United States. This challenge prevents them from achieving economic sustainability. One of the group members expressed her frustration to become financially independent as a locked door. She said, "I come from a family of business owners in Mexico. But in this country, I don't know how to find the key that will allow me to open the door."

In August of 2004, a group of people from the Latino community with the support of Partners for Prosperity met with Juan Linares from the Northwest Area Foundation to discuss the possibility of a Mercado in Blackfoot, Idaho. Blackfoot is centrally located in Bingham County and the 16 county region served by Partners for Prosperity. Blackfoot is known as a central location for Latino dances, quinceañeras, and other cultural events with people coming from as far as Utah, Montana, and Wyoming to attend these events.

From this meeting, the Mercado Subcommittee was formed with an initial group of 20 individuals. From this group, 10 members were elected to travel to Minneapolis, Minnesota, to visit a successful Mercado model. The group was joined by Brandon Bird, Blackfoot Economic Director. In Minneapolis, the Mercado sub-committee received outcomes training. After visiting Minneapolis, the Mercado subcommittee presented an informational presentation. Approximately 50 people from the Latino community, Native American community, and local community attended the meeting. The group also made their presentation to "The Self Development of People", a Presbyterian grant organization. Since then, the group has been meeting twice a month, as a Mercado Subcommittee, and as part of the Prosperity Creation Working group with the Native American community. This group has built relationships with each other. This is the first time in the History of Blackfoot, Idaho, that two minority cultural groups have met in an effort to fight poverty in their communities. Several positive decisions have come from the Prosperity Creation working group. First, the working group voted to direct funds to the Idaho Development Account (IDA) deciding that this would benefit the community the most. Second, the group



decided to provide a cultural training in order to understand each other's culture and begin the process of healing between the two communities. The workshop provides training in internal racial oppression (IRO). This workshop is gender specific, therefore the training will first be provided to the Native and Latino women. And third, the small business owners decided to join efforts in marketing to each other. They will create a brochure with their business names; provide a discount card to clients they refer to each other; create a collaborative fund for those who need some financial assistance, and market their businesses at local city events as Partners in Business.

The Mercado sub-committee came up with a strategy to reduce poverty in the Latino community. **“Build a Mercado incubator market place in Blackfoot that will develop and enhance small Latino businesses leading to increased economic opportunities and cultural awareness for the regional community.”** The committee elected two co-chairs, Laura Jaramillo and Priscilla Serena. The group then drafted a comprehensive outreach plan for the Latino population in 16 counties of Southeast Idaho. This will allow surrounding counties the opportunity to join the committee. Each group member received an outreach assignment. A colorful outreach flyer with potential outcomes was drafted by one of the group members. The group also drafted an asset inventory to find out how many people were interested in starting a small business. Since that time, the group has conducted personal outreach to over 500 Latino families including the Idaho State University Latino family invitational in Idaho Falls, and a faith-based community of over 300 people in Blackfoot, Idaho.

We welcomed new members at our last meeting. A young father who labors long hours in roofing and dreams of owning his own business; a mother who works in a potato processing plant and claims to make the best tortas around; a coach who worries because some families can't afford to pay a sign-up fee for their children to play soccer; and a small business owner who can't expand because he lacks access to loan programs. The Mercado sub-committee decided that their biggest obstacle was lack of knowledge in the United States capitalist economy. This access to knowledge is compounded because of language barriers. In order to move forward, the group feels they need business training in Spanish. The cost will be covered if they are awarded a \$20,000.00 grant written by the committee. The group also voted to become a business alliance. They named themselves the Southeast Idaho Latino Business Alliance. An interim board will travel to Boise for a Latino Leadership Summit and meet with the Boise Latino Business Association to learn the steps required to formally incorporate. They are also looking forward to receiving training from Juan Linares from the Northwest Area Foundation at the end of March.

The group has begun to unlock the door the success for themselves and their families. Two of their strongest supporters at meetings are Brandon Bird, Economic Director for Bingham County, and John Hathaway, District Health and Welfare Director. Brandon Bird has committed to represent the group in local government and provide a location for a Mercado business. Mr. Hathaway has informed the group that Health and Welfare currently has a program available that can provide the group computer training. With determination and local support, the Mercado sub-committee is becoming a successful grassroots organization dedicated to reducing poverty in Southeast Idaho.