

## In the Land of Bratwurst, a New Hispanic Boom

### In a Big Population Shift, Latino Immigrants Flock To Towns in the Midwest

By PAULETTE THOMAS

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

MILWAUKEE—Better known for beer and bratwurst, this city has dozens of Mexican restaurants and watering holes stretching block after block of low-slung buildings on the Hispanic south side.

Groceries distribute not one but three local Hispanic newspapers. A Yellow Pages for Hispanic businesses runs to 300 pages. Last year, Hispanic magazine rated Milwaukee the seventh-best city in America for Hispanics.

Milwaukee?

Hispanic immigrants and their descendants are fanning out and settling into Midwestern towns, far from the border regions and metropolitan centers more renowned as Latino hubs. "Vision Latina" began publishing last year for Nebraska Hispanics. Kansas City, Mo., and Cleveland have thriving Hispanic communities.

While about 60% of the U.S. Hispanic population, 18 million people, live in 10 major metropolitan areas, about 13 million Hispanics reside in second-tier cities across the U.S. Though little noticed, "that dispersal is one of the big stories of the 1990s," says Michael Ptx, director of immigration studies for the Urban Institute, a Washington, D.C., think tank.

### The New Melting Pot

Ranked by percentage increase of immigrants from 1995 to 1999\*

STATE	GROWTH
1 North Carolina	73%
2 Nevada	60
3 Kansas	54
4 Indiana	50
5 Minnesota	43
6 Virginia	40
7 Maryland	39
8 Arizona	35
9 Utah	31
10 Oregon	26

\*For states with a foreign-born population of at least 50,000 in 1995

Source: Urban Institute

Many immigrants find second-tier cities more hospitable to newcomers than bigger cities, with affordable homes, decent public schools and job opportunities, particularly in Midwestern meat-packing plants, factories and foundries.

Once a family gets a foothold, others follow. That migration, dating back to the 1930s, has cre-

ated a pool of Hispanics that represents about 4% of the Milwaukee population, leaving a deep imprint on the shores of Lake Michigan.

Across Wisconsin, the Hispanic population has tripled since 1980, to 185,000. "Milwaukee feels like home," says Gianfranco Tessaro, who moved from Peru to Milwaukee in 1981, following a brother, who met him at the airport with a pair of thick-soled shoes for the snow. Like most of the new Hispanic arrivals, Mr. Tessaro quickly found a low-skilled job. He started in a sheet-metal factory, cleaning and doing odd jobs. Since then, he married a Midwesterner, raised two sons, and now owns his own business, Inspired Artisans Ltd., which sells liturgical art and renovates churches.

Isolation of the first Hispanic Midwesterners has turned into community. "When I grew up in Boulder, there was one other Hispanic family," says Loren Aragon, who is 33. Today, Mr. Aragon lives in Milwaukee and works for his brother's thriving firm, Site Temporaries Inc., which places temporary workers, nearly all Puerto Rican immigrants, in light industrial jobs. About 600 a week pile into buses, along with translators on staff, who help pave the way. He supplies companies with lists of Spanish translations for words such as "breakroom" or "restroom," if they like.

With Wisconsin unemployment hovering around 3%, the foundries and factories of Milwaukee—home of Harley-Davidson Inc., Quad Graphics and a large J.C. Penney Co. distribution center—have given an especially warm welcome to the Hispanic workers. When Allen Edmonds Shoe

Please Turn to Page B4, Column 3

## A Hispanic Boom Transforms Milwaukee

Continued From Page B1

Corp. couldn't fill jobs at its factory in northern Ozaukee County, it moved some of its operations to a facility on the south side of Milwaukee. Now, nearly all of its employees there are Hispanic, and most walk to their jobs. Strolling out after Friday's regular shift, manager Sue Samson describes turnover at the facility in one word: "None."

A wariness of government has kept many Hispanics underground and without political voice. Hispanic leaders believe the census bureau has woefully undercounted the number of Hispanics in Milwaukee. Only 7% of the registered Hispanics voted in the past general election. Milwaukee has elected only two Hispanics to public office, Circuit Judge Elsa Lamelas and State Rep. Pedro Colon. Without a unified voice, Mr. Colon warned in a recent speech, "The south side will continue to decay."

Often a community is galvanized by a single energetic force, and in Milwaukee's Hispanic quarters it is 34-year-old Maria Monreal-Cameron. Presiding from a cluttered office in an incubator of mostly Hispanic businesses, a floor below Allen Edmonds, she is nominally the president of the Wisconsin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, but her mission is to advance Hispanic people through every means she knows.

As a child in Wisconsin, Ms. Monreal-Cameron often woke up to find strangers huddled under blankets on her living room

*At the Wisconsin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the president still encounters stereotypes. A hotel staffer called and blurted, 'I need housemaids.'*

floor. They were families from Mexico and Puerto Rico, journeying for work in the factories of Milwaukee. Her parents, Mexican immigrants themselves, never turned away the new arrivals.

As an adult, she began joining local community boards when her youngest of six children was grown. She now is active on 18, often the first Hispanic representative.

She plays matchmaker with banks and businesses, acts as informal adviser to local entrepreneurs, and presses her political contacts for improvements on the south side. She successfully took on the political establishment in a fight to upgrade the Sixth Street Viaduct, a ratty-looking 99-year-old bridge over the channel and industrial section that separates the Hispanic south side from Milwaukee's downtown. "It's the gateway to our community," she says.

She also helped secure government grants for the incubator, the Milwaukee Enterprise Center, with 25 small firms, mostly Hispanic. Their numbers include

people like Roberto Fuentes, a former migrant worker who now has a small machine tooling shop. "This is something that doesn't take a lot of education, but you need some training," he says, sauntering past his machines.

Adalberto Olivares, a local Vietnam veteran, wanted to start a trucking business on a small loan from a former employer. "Al was leasing one truck," she says. "I said, 'You know what? Let's get going here, let's make it happen.'" She persuaded him to move his business into the incubator, and helped him get financing. He now has a fleet of 23 trucks, 12 of which are owner-operated.

Ms. Monreal-Cameron rolls her eyes at the inevitable stereotyping she encounters. A human-resources person from a local hotel called Ms. Monreal-Cameron blurted, "I need housemaids." Ms. Monreal-Cameron responded that the chamber isn't a placement service, but she knew several executives who would be fine human-resource candidates. "She hung up on me," Ms. Monreal-Cameron says.