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## Welcome to the Quad Cities Diversity Matters

### Why Immigration is Important to the Quad Cities

The IL QC Chamber's Leadership class challenges up and coming leaders to tackle tough community issues. Our group was faced with the challenge of how to attract immigrants to the Quad City area. Creating a diverse community is not a simple task but a long-term goal. John F. Kennedy once said that "If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity".

In the Quad Cities we embrace community, family, faith and quality of life. What is so hard about creating a diverse community? First, we have to open the roads to different cultures, backgrounds and beliefs. Second, we have to find a way to co-exist in our Midwest, apple-pie, slice of life community here in the Quad Cities.

Why should we care about immigrants coming to our area? Will immigrant growth be important for our economic stability and quality of life years from now? The answers might not be clear today but it is time for our country to start waking up. Technology makes globalization an issue that can not be ignored any longer. Some say the Midwest is behind and needs to start catching up. We say the Quad Cities are up for the challenge!

Long ago immigrants started migrating to our country. After all, we are the land of the free with many cultural melting pots through out our states. Some people came out of fear of what their lives would be like if they stayed in their homeland. Others came for opportunity and to better provide for their families. But whatever the reason, America is the ultimate dream. Iowa and Illinois might not be as sexy as immigration hot spots like Florida, Arizona or California, so we will have to work a little harder.

It is believed that immigrant growth is important for our economic stability and quality of life because the United States population is growing older and there will not be enough workers to support the government and economy in the future. The aging US population creates serious challenges for Social Security and the nation's retirement systems. Based on the CIS study (Center for International Studies), net immigration in the United States is currently 1.25 million; 67.3 percent are of working age (15-64 years); however, by 2040 the share of working age population will decrease to 59.8 percent. This data seems to confirm the urgent need for immigrant growth in the United States. In addition, part of dependence on foreign-born workers is due to the rapid expansion of the science and engineering fields, which has outpaced native-born U.S. workers. America may face a shortage of 4 to 6 million skilled workers by 2010.

Richard Longworth illustrates the need to accept immigrants in his Beardstown example from "Caught in the Middle". Beardstown was a tough little river town in west Central Illinois. It was a blue collar place, and called itself "redneck" with pride. Well past midcentury, it was one of those Midwestern towns called sundowners, where unwritten law decreed that no African-American be caught in town after dusk.

Beardstown population was changing and it was on its way to becoming 30 percent Mexican. Worse, the Mexicans would take jobs at lower wages than the whites of Cass County. Almost everyone in Beardstown wished the Mexicans weren't there. One problem with wishing them away, the Mexicans and the packinghouse where they worked, Cargill Meat Solutions, saved Beardstown, Illinois. The old railroad roundhouse closed down, so did the refrigeration plant and the glove factory. Young people went off to college and never come back. The old folks died and were not replaced by a younger generation. From Beardstown, it is sixty miles to Springfield, eighty miles to Peoria - too far for most people to commute. If not for the Cargill Plant and the cheap labor that kept it there, Beardstown would shrivel, perhaps die.

The Quality of life that Beardstown once knew has never returned. This illustrates why it is important that we take the next step is to integrate and accept immigration into our own communities. We must welcome immigrants rather than oppose them.

Many American cities have absorbed huge numbers of foreign immigrants. Generally, immigrants are drawn to large cities that offer significant employment and career opportunities. Some cities attract immigrants without any explicit plan, while others are beginning to apply policies towards immigrant attraction and promotion of immigrant success. Cities like Minneapolis, Minnesota and Ft. Wayne, Indiana are taking proactive steps to increase their immigrant population. Here in the Quad Cities we have to step up our efforts and work just a little harder.

### **How Do We Get The Word Out to Immigrants to Come to the Quad Cities?**

According to G. Pascal Zachary, author of "The Diversity Advantage", there is no single action that will improve immigrant flow. Cities operate under many constraints and rarely influence national policy on immigration. However, cities do have many soft options, which include opening promotion offices in other countries, opening welcome centers for new arrivals and promoting practices within their own communities that will include current immigrants and assist them with assimilation into the community.

Immigrants are looking for jobs, opportunities, entrepreneurship, low housing costs and easy assimilation into the community. However, research has shown that there is a natural tendency for people from abroad to settle where they have friends and relatives. 75% of immigrants come to the United States because of another family member. Legal immigrants bring between two and 100 other immigrants with them. Besides employment, freedom from persecution and law and order are the two other main reasons people come to the United States. The three main reasons they choose a location are (1) immigrants are more concentrated than natives of the same age and ethnicity; and (2) education plays a key role; and (3) internal migration within the United States.

So if 75% of immigrants come to the US because of another family member we must understand what the Quad Cities looks like. As of the 2000 census data, here is the breakdown of the immigrant population in the Quad City area:

### Immigrant Admissions FY'91-'98: Top Ten Countries

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Country</u>	<u>No. of Immigrants</u>
1	Vietnam	892
2	Mexico	650
3	India	155
4	Canada	92
5	Philippines	90
6	Korea	67
7	China *	58
8	United Kingdom	55
9	Germany	42
10	Soviet Union	41

\* Includes Hong Kong and Taiwan.

### ***POPULATION PROJECTION 2025***

*The current rate of population change between 1990-2000, if continued, would result in a metro area population in 2025 of 376,000. That is an increase of five percent from the 2000 population. Chart source: [www.fairus.org](http://www.fairus.org).*

To expand our existing immigrant base, we should consider that those already living here could have extended family living elsewhere within the United States. We could help to facilitate their families move to our area. By taking proactive measures to assist existing immigrants in becoming productive members of our community, we provide them a reason to want to stay. In return they will encourage others to come. Acceptance or settlement into the community is one of the primary causes for success or failure in retaining newcomers.

So, how do we get the word out to get immigrants to consider our area? Based on our research the best ways to get immigrants to come to the Quad Cities is through word of mouth and through our actions.

### **Taking Action**

The following are suggested actions we could take to promote our community and attract immigrants to the area:

#### **Benchmarking and Studies**

- Determine how intercultural our city is and determine how to measure it by studying diversity indicators and benchmarks.

#### **Communication**

- Create a brochure and welcome packet that provide information about immigration policies, requirements and options available to immigrants wishing

to settle in the United States. The brochure should draw upon our strengths and inspire people to explore the community further. Basically, explain the benefits of why they would want to chose the Quad City area to live, provide information to assist newcomers with settlement issues, and provide testimonial from immigrants who live in the area. Also include frequently asked questions, reference information including a list of institutions and organizations that can help with arrival and other topics currently not on our Quad City Chamber of Commerce Web-site such as:

- **Permanent residency obligations and immigration information**
  - **Basic legal rights and responsibilities**
  - **Obtaining drivers license and other basic documents**
  - **Subsidized housing and how to be an American tenant**
  - **Language resources**
  - **Finding work and employment opportunities**
  - **Starting your own business**
  - **Social services and community resources**
  - **Parks and recreation; other leisure activities**
  - **Directory of places to worship**
  - **Youth and child service organizations**
  - **Educational opportunities**
- Provide a welcome packet for dissemination to agencies such as Catholic Dioceses, World Relief, State Immigration office, Churches United, Generations Vietnamese Program, Floreciente Association, Prairie State Legal office, Catholic Charities, QC Affirming Diversity, QC Interfaith, Conciliate of Chicago, Friendly House, Embassy of Mexico, QC Alliance of Immigrants and Refugees, universities, colleges, real estate agencies and employers like Tyson, Norcross, Alcoa, Deere and owners of ethnic restaurants that maybe interested in sponsoring refugees or immigrants.
  - The internet will be one of the first places people will check for information about our area. We need to maximize its effectiveness as a recruitment tool. To ensure wide exposure we need to strategically link our Web site to larger sources including local, state and federal sites. Make the site easy to navigate and available in different languages. Start with language options for our primary immigrant population in the Quad Cities: Spanish and Vietnamese (Burmese and Somaliland populations are growing.) By listing key information in several languages we will communicate to immigrants and refugees "you are welcome here". Include a link to our welcome packet.
  - Create a link on the QC Chamber and Economic Development group Web site in key languages for local job openings. Only about 10 to 15% of all available jobs are ever advertised. We need to make efforts to widen the posting of available jobs. It will be important to gain employer participation.

- Send articles to magazines and organizations for publication about the Quad Cities immigration efforts. For example Hola America, Latinos Unidos, El Heraldo Hispano, and Hispanic Business. Also, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops could advertise our efforts during their National Migration week held each year.
- Prominently display a mission statement that promotes and honors ethnic diversity on our community Web-sites, in civic buildings and international airports. This will let newcomers know our community is a welcoming environment.
- Proactive efforts at assimilation have been lacking during the latest wave of immigration. Effectively distribute information about the Quad Cities to newcomers. Although information is available it is not always easily accessible. Canadian research indicated that newcomers felt that they lacked the necessary information to successfully integrate into their community.

### **Action Items**

- Create a mentor/sponsor program using volunteers from trades, professionals and other ethnic organizations to assist newcomers with basic information on how to overcome hurdles in getting reestablished. Offer free guided tours of the cities.
- Education programs need to be equitable and take into account the needs of newcomers with different language abilities, cultural backgrounds and learning styles.
- Partner with employers like Tyson and other organizations that would promote bringing people to the QC. Display posters that would list contact telephone numbers if someone is interested in bringing a family member to our area with a work visa.
- Recommend partnering with organizations that work with immigrants to facilitate a community-based initiative to provide delivery of English language, cross-cultural education to the community, orientation sessions for international newcomers, including students, and work with other government and community stakeholders on immigration issues.
- Participate at the cultural fair at Black Hawk College to celebrate different cultures in our community. Distribute welcome packets that incorporate information about tourist and work visas.
- Tourists or temporary visitors can raise the awareness of the community's desirability. Market vacation properties to tourists seeking a secondary home and workers on temporary work assignments.
- Market our colleges as a prime destination for international students. Create a mentor program at the schools to provide friendship and support.
- Work with and encourage faith communities to sponsor refugees.
- A successful immigration process can be measured by successful settlement outcomes. Survey newcomers to find out what our strengths and weaknesses are when it comes to providing a welcoming environment.
- Donate tickets for sports and cultural events and establish programs for trial memberships for.
- Promote 211 United Way of the Quad Cities information and referral services.

We are facing a global market and we want to attract the best and brightest. We must identify our strengths and figure out how to sell them in a competitive marketplace. We need a forward looking policy. Our strategies to attract people must also include how we will retain them and this will depend on the welcome the community extends. A team approach is absolutely critical to our success.

By taking an early approach to the immigration challenge we will place our community in the forefront for people looking for opportunities. There is a lot of planning required and we must develop our own unique and appropriate population strategy. If we are going to attract immigrants to our community we must make it a priority; we must assign an individual to lead the charge. Adding this to someone's already full plate is not going to get the job done. Adding a coordinator between resources may not seem realistic in the current economic environment, but it is necessary if we are going to move forward. This person will form a Board with different representatives from the various ethnic groups in our community. This Board will be the face of our community and will provide direction. The Minnesota Foundation's Blue Print for Action for Embracing Immigrants advised that anyone leading the charge must be familiar with the current immigration laws and resource availability to ensure success. We must think regionally and bring civic-minded people with financial and intellectual power together in a think tank encounter to bounce ideas off each other. Like Canada, we can create a Tool Box that provides an introduction for settlement practices and issues, and assesses and area's ability to deal with an influx of immigrants.

In addition, we should establish a welcome committee comprised of people from outside organizations that deal with immigrants, employers who see immigration as critical to maintaining their workforce, and different ethnic groups that can champion their needs and help us to gain a wider perspective and acceptance. Immigrants naturally want to understand and adapt to their new homes. But they also want to be heard, and they want to be included.

Language is often a barrier to attracting and retaining new immigrants and is consistently identified as a need to help integrate migrants into the community. It is important to develop a list of local residents who are fluent in other languages and can assist newcomers. According to Martin Wells from Translation Unlimited many times they are unaware of the need for a translator until they receive a call from an emergency room. Our welcoming committee would create a list of community-based volunteer interpreters and translators. They would assist newcomers on a personal basis when they are struggling with English and also assist during emergencies. This will help to forge friendships and ensure newcomers feel welcomed and valued in our community.

Anne Grove from World Relief advised that immigrants already have informal networks. If there was a point of contact person this would assist with the process. There are business owners in the Quad Cities that would be interested in working with a 'point of contact' person for immigration. There are businesses in our area with ethnic connections (i.e. gas stations, Hindu/Mexican/Thai restaurants, churches, etc.)

Community contacts from World Relief, Congressman Hare's office and Translation Unlimited and also Ft. Wayne, Indiana's Chamber of Commerce voiced their opinion

that having a person(s) to coordinate immigration efforts and social services would be critical to our success. Currently, everyone works in isolation. A coordinator would serve as point of contact person for non-profit organizations that assist immigrants, employers willing to sponsor immigrants and/or people wanting to bring family members to the QC.

## Challenges We Face and Future Direction

The real question isn't about our future with immigrants but more about our future without them. Our long term focus is to create a culture that embraces our differences so that people understand, enjoy and value them. Our future direction will be to sell the benefits of the Quad Cities and to influence immigrants to come here by using successful marketing models such as those used by Chicago and the Twin Cities, "Minnesota Nice". If we are to compete with the big cities, our focus will be to market the benefits of living in a small community by focusing on safety, low housing costs, lower cost of living, school systems, and the close proximity to many big cities (Chicago, Des Moines, and Saint Louis.)



We must identify the endless opportunities that new ethnic groups create and the new businesses we can create to cater to them. For example, the Hispanic population, currently estimated to be about 44 million, is one of the fastest-growing groups in America, making up some 14% of the total population. This rapid growth is significantly impacting both the American economy and our cultural landscape. Purchasing power among U.S. Hispanics has been steadily increasing during the past two decades, and is set to continue growing rapidly for some time.

We must hire a coordinator and establish objectives for the Board to centralize policies and efforts. Right now, immigration policies are spread across many agencies whose work often overlap and can be contradictory. There is no sole official responsible solely for coordinating immigration work.

We must effectively communicate the newly created position to various non-profit agencies that assist immigrants. We can send a letter to agencies, schools and businesses to explain the purpose of the position and ask for a contact person that can assist with this effort.

We must involve the community and the media to obtain support and buy in for the concept. The new position could be advertised at city council meetings, school board meetings and in the various media outlets.

## Conclusion- Winning the Battle

Winners of immigration success will be those who can effectively market their area, navigate cultural differences, provide legitimate pathways for future immigrants to come and work legally, design guest worker policies that promote integration, promote economic growth in counties that are heavy senders of immigrants, workplace education programs, workplace skill programs, additional resources for civic and English-language education, and a position dedicated to the immigration process.

While we have explored many options for enticing immigrants to select the Quad City area as a choice destination for relocation to the United States, two main concepts were resoundingly repeated as the key to successfully attracting and retaining immigrants to our community. The first is to establish a coordinator position to serve as a central contact point, eliminating a duplication of efforts among many other businesses and organizations will be critical if we are to succeed. The second effort will be to expand contact with existing immigrant communities, providing information on the Quad City area, the benefits that our area has to offer, and providing a welcoming climate. Through these efforts, we gain the immigrant population growth through word of mouth, that we have seen to be one way to increase population numbers.

To facilitate this method of communication we are recommending establishing a coordinator position within the Chamber that would work extensively within both the informal and formal networking systems that have been established by immigrant populations. While the economic climate may, at first, seem to limit the option of establishing new positions, this coordinator position will be an absolute necessity if we are to bring immigrants to our area, provide them with the information that they need to feel welcome, and help maintain an environment where they want to establish and maintain new residency.

The coordinator position would be responsible for making contact through affiliations such as churches, community organizations, employee based populations and establishing a single point of reference for those seeking information on the area when looking to encourage friends and family members to select the Quad Cities as their destination within the United States.



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