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Special Report: Immigration in Montana

📅 November 16, 2015, 9 hours ago



Helena, MT – Immigration reform is a hot topic in the 2016 presidential race.

In Montana, the U.S. Census Bureau reports Hispanics and Latinos make up about 3.5% of the total population.

Louie Lopez, a Mexico native, moved to the queen city in search of a better life.

After opening his restaurant Louie's Casa Diego 6 years ago, he has been hard at work every day preparing, cooking, and serving the community of Helena.

"I worked at an old family restaurant called Frontier Pies. That is where I got my start in cooking and I have been at it ever since."

It was a dream come true for Lopez bringing his culture to Montana.

He came to the Treasure State in 1990 from San Diego, Calif.

Lopez worked at various locations in Helena, before opening his restaurant on Lyndale Ave.

"A learning experience I can tell you that much right now. People are different," said Lopez.

However, it wasn't easy introducing his food right away after he experience discrimination.

"I took a neighbor a menu one day before I opened in one of my locations and that person threw the menu at me and said we don't eat your kind of food. You people are known as drug addicts. We don't need you next door to us," said Lopez.

It is experiences like Louie's, many immigrants across the country can face when moving to a different region where they are in the minority.

The restaurant owner described the incident as painful, when he heard the words.

“It hurts me inside when that happened to me,” said Lopez.

Latinos and Hispanics make up 3.5% of Montana’s population.

While, Blacks and African Americans represent just below 1% and Native Americans less than 7%, creating a gap in diversity.

According to Shahid Haque-Hausrath, Border Crossing Law Firm Attorney and University of Montana Professor, immigrants can feel depressed.

“They tend to experience some sense of isolation.”

He said the Treasure State is different compared to other parts of the country.

“Unlike other states where there can be large groups of people that can form together and can have a sense of community,” added Haque-Hausrath.

However, The Montana Immigrant Justice Alliance has been trying to fix the problem for immigrants by giving them a place to go.

“We try to relieve that sense of isolation and depression that goes along with that, by helping create a sense of community for Latinos,” added Haque-Hausrath.

Today, immigrants such as Lopez work hard to find their place.

“I am here for success. I am not here to burden the country or the world. I am here to make a difference of a better which is feed food to people.”

” said Lopez.

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The Helena restaurant owner added he is thankful for the community of Helena.

“The people are beautiful very much beautiful. There is more good than there is bad.”

Over 40% of immigrants in Montana are naturalized U.S. citizens and can vote.

According to the American Immigration Council, not only are immigrants important to the state’s economy as workers, but they also account for tens of millions of dollars in tax revenue and consumer purchasing power.



Reporter: Camilla Rambaldi

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