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Entrepreneurship and Latina Business Ownership in Dallas, TX

By Christine Bolaños

Over the last couple of years, Hispanics have taken Texas by storm, surpassing other demographic groups in population and immersing themselves into business and entrepreneurial ventures.

Hispanics accounted for two-thirds of the state's growth in the last decade, according to the U.S. Census. Latinos now make up 38 percent of the state's 25.1 million people, up from 32 percent a decade ago. There are an estimated 9.4 million Latinos in Texas.

In the United States, the Latino population increased by 15.2 million between 2000 and 2010 and accounted for more than half of the total U.S. population increase of 27.3 million. Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population grew by 43 percent, or four times the nation's 9.7 percent growth rate.

With an increase in their population, Hispanics have naturally, also been opening up their own businesses at a higher rate than ever before. The number of Hispanic-owned businesses in the United States increased by 43.7 percent to 2.3 million, more than twice the national rate of 18 percent between 2002 and 2007.

In Texas, the number of Latino firms rose by 40 percent from 2002 to 2007 for a total of 447,589 firms in 2007. Hispanic-owned businesses in Texas took in \$62 billion in revenue in 2007 and employed almost 400,000 people, according to the U.S. Census.

Latinas, more than ever, are finding efficient ways to balance work and life and paving the way for future generations to become the leaders of tomorrow.

Although there is limited historical data to precisely measure the advancement of Latinas in the workplace, key historical events help piece the puzzle together. In 1929, the League of Latin American Citizens (LULAC), an organization that focuses on education, civil rights and employment issues, formed when several Latino service organizations merged to eventually become the largest and oldest Latino civil rights group in the country.

Then in 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, created the Fair Employment Practices Committee, banning employment discrimination in defense industries or government on the basis of race, creed, color or national origin. In 1986, Congress approved the Immigration Reform and Control Act, which legalized some undocumented workers and set guidelines and sanctions for employers hiring non-U.S. citizens. By 2003, census numbers showed the Hispanic community to be the nation's largest minority group and so it has remained.

As such, Hispanics have made a considerable impact on various industries, including by opening their own businesses and entrepreneurship.

Hispanic businesses are defined as firms in which people of Latino origin own 51 percent or more of the overall business for which yearly receipts were more than \$1,000 in nominal prices. Dallas, which has the highest population of any metropolitan area in the state, saw a 55 percent increase in Hispanic-owned businesses between 2002 and 2007.

"One of the reasons you're seeing more growth in Hispanic businesses is that often times Hispanics have fewer choices when it comes to academia and jobs that require graduate or professional degrees. It's sometimes easier to pursue a business than pursue a degree without a known reward," said Dr. Edward Rincon of Rincon & Associates, a Dallas-based marketing research firm that helps corporations understand multicultural consumers.

"In addition, some geographic areas like Dallas/Fort Worth offer a very positive climate for doing business. The entrepreneurial spirit has always been high among Latinos who are more likely to open up restaurants, invest in supermarkets and own construction firms."

According to a report Rincon & Associates prepared using 2010 census data, Latinos in the Dallas-Ft. Worth metropolitan area, grew from 1.1 million to 1.7 million between 2000 and 2010, a dramatic increase of 57 percent. The number of Hispanic-owned firms in Dallas has steadily increased from 32,154 in 1997, to 44,952 in 2002 and 69,265 in 2007, according to the Survey of Minority-Owned Businesses, which the Census conducts every five years.

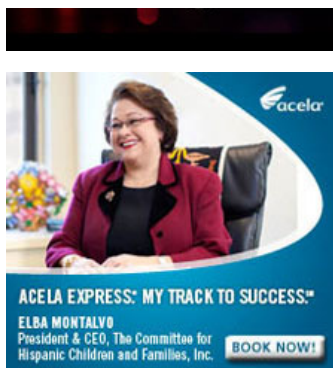
The survey does not break down the number of firms by ethnicity and gender, thus, the number of Hispanic-owned businesses owned by each gender is unknown. According to Rincon & Associate's presentation, the construction industry continues to attract the largest number of Hispanic-owned businesses in the area. Twenty-four percent of Hispanic-owned businesses are in construction, followed by 14 percent in administrative support and waste management and remediation and nine percent in transportation and warehousing.



Photo provided by the Dallas CVB, photo by Marco Becerra.



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In the 2007 survey, Dallas-based Latino business owners reported \$10.3 billion in sales and \$1.8 billion in payroll. However, only nine percent of Latino firms had paid employees. This finding could indicate that many Hispanic-owned businesses are small businesses and relatively new.

A 1998 journal published by the International Council of Small Business, "Characteristics of Hispanic Female Business Owners: An Exploratory Study" reported findings based on responses of 2,700 Hispanic business owners who were members of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

The number of names selected in each geographical area was proportionate to the total number of Hispanic business located in 16 metropolitan areas nationwide with a high number of Latino firms. Among those areas were Houston, San Antonio, El Paso and Dallas.

The study found that Latina business owners tended to be younger than their male counterparts. As a result, Latina business owners also tended to have less business experience. In addition, Latina business owners were less likely to be married than their male counterparts.

Female-owned firms also tended to have fewer employees than male-owned firms. No gender difference in net profit margin or growth in sales and employment was found as a result of the study.

The education level of Hispanic business owners who participated in the survey was found to be high and female business owners were found to be represented in diverse sectors of the economy, including manufacturing. Hispanic business owners are expected to continue to be a driving force in the Texas and Dallas economy. The Greater Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce reported having 1,200 members as of May.

"As the Dallas Latino community has prospered and gained a better understanding of the opportunities available to entrepreneurs, the number of Hispanic-owned businesses has grown with the help of organizations like the Hispanic chamber."

For Latina business owners, it is not enough to be successful without helping others reach their full potential as well. "Latina entrepreneurs are a driving force behind Dallas' economic growth. We have some of the most successful Latina-owned businesses in our city who have built their businesses through hard work, dedication, and determination," said Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings. "These women are not only great business leaders, but are public servants serving as social advocates in several important fronts such as education, senior services, and public policy."

In addition, infrastructure projects in Dallas are helping attract even more business-minded people to Dallas and opening opportunities for more jobs and even better quality of life.

The Trinity River Corridor Project is one of the most monumental public works and economic development projects ever attempted in Dallas, officials say. As flood protection, recreation, environmental restoration, economic development, and major transportation components converge along the Trinity River, officials hope it will become a destination for tourists and families alike.

"Dallas is a great city to do business, visit, and to raise a family. We offer so much and have the right recipe for success. We know that Latinas will thrive here because of the location, resources, and the amenities offered in a big city like Dallas," said Veronica Torres, director of diversity marketing at the Dallas Convention and Visitors Bureau.

It comes as no surprise to Dr. Steve Murdock, former director of the Census Bureau and currently a sociology professor at Rice University in Houston, that more Latinas are choosing to become entrepreneurs and business owners, as every immigration wave to the United States, had led to business start-ups as a way for immigrants and future generations to live the American dream.

"We're seeing Hispanics increasingly involved in enterprises at all levels. That's not unusual. When you look at new groups, generally, the entrance points are small businesses," he explained. "But it doesn't have to be a Hispanic-owned company to have Hispanic leadership. If you look at major businesses in Texas, you will find CEOs and people at all levels that are Hispanic."

In *Hispanic Woman Seeking Higher Leadership Roles in Business*, author Dr. Sylvia Motta tackles the delicate balance professional Latinas must strike between their careers and personal lives.

"In the past, we had to give up our attempts at having a professional career or furthering our education but this is no longer true. We now have choices and independence to stand behind what we believe in that makes us happy," Motta writes.

She calls educated Latinas the fastest growing workforce group. One way to overcome obstacles in trying to balance everything is by having mentors, Motta believes. "Mentoring partnerships in organizations help minority women advance into senior leadership positions," she writes.

She is not alone in this belief as many professional women in the Dallas area have joined forces under Hispanic 100, a non-profit organization that works to promote Latina leadership in the private and public sectors. Members must be nominated in order to join the organization. Hispanic 100 provides business development opportunities for Latina-owned firms and Latina educational initiatives.

The organization was organized in 1996 as Hispanic 50, and was changed to Hispanic 100 in 2003 as membership grew. "We saw a need to highlight Hispanic women leadership in Dallas. You have to be a proven leader and show that you have served the community," said co-founder Delia Reyes.

And it is not just Hispanics who are planting seeds or furthering their careers in Dallas, it is people in general. "Dallas is really known as a business city. There are a lot of resources here," said Torres. "They set up national and major regional offices in this area. It's just so big and so vast. A lot of companies are relocating or setting up a satellite. One of the largest Hispanic Chambers is in Dallas. They provide a lot of resources for small businesses."

The Greater Dallas Chamber of Commerce offers a variety of resources to its members, including networking conferences, technology seminars, an annual exposition, scholarships for students and an awards banquet recognizing local Latino success.



Veronica Torres.



Dr. Edward Rincon.



Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings.



Ricardo Ortiz.

"At the Hispanic Chamber, we recognize that Latinos have a strong entrepreneurial spirit and a drive to succeed, so our programs and efforts—from providing college scholarships to deserving students to nurturing new businesses through our incubators—are designed to support and encourage that spirit and drive," said Ortiz.

Hispanic 100 also offers a mentor program that provides Hispanic youth with specialty training such as business etiquette, leadership development, financial literacy and entrepreneurship.

Another group, Latin Entrepreneur Association of Dallas or L.E.A.D., consists of Latino entrepreneurs and professionals ranging in ages 21 to 35 who want to expand their business through referrals and events.

While there has been an increase in Latina entrepreneurs and business owners in recent years, Latinas still have a long way to go when it comes to pay and career advancements. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, Hispanic women earned only 52.9 cents for each dollar earned by white men as of September 2010, Dr. Motta writes.

"As more women have entered the workforce and the involvement of organizational initiatives such as diversity training have helped decrease negative views on women management capabilities, Hispanic women still lag behind any other group and continue to face barriers in upward professional mobility," Dr. Motta writes. However, experts predict Latinas will continue paving the way for future generations of leaders, entrepreneurs and business women during this time of exponential growth.

"Their experience, skills, education, and capabilities have made them a valuable group that is so strongly needed in the business world. The ability to help support and guide Hispanic women so that they can have equal opportunities at higher leadership positions needs to be in place now," Dr. Motta writes.

More resources are available to ambitious Latinas than ever



more resources are available to ambitious Latinas than ever before, including those provided by the Hispanic Women's Network of Texas. Its 26th annual leadership and training conference is slated for October 19-21 in Dallas.

San Antonio Mayor Julian Castro.



McKinney park in Dallas.



The Omni Hotel.

According to the Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce, there are about 140,000 Hispanic-owned businesses in Texas. "TAMACC recognizes that Texas has one of the largest numbers of Hispanic women-owned businesses at approximately 140,000," said Ben Mendez, TAMACC Board Chair. "We feel that it's important to showcase the talent and contributions Latinos are making in our great state."

Based on the latest available data, all major Texas cities have experienced Latino growth. Austin has 277,707 Hispanics and 21,225 Hispanic-owned firms. San Antonio is home to 838,952 Hispanics and 56,644 Latino firms. Corpus Christi has 182,181 Hispanics and 12,110 Hispanic-owned businesses. Houston has 919,668 Hispanics and 104,368 Latino firms.

"The American Dream of entrepreneurship is on display every day in cities like San Antonio where Latinas represent the fastest growing segment of small business owners," says San Antonio Mayor Julián Castro. "San Antonio has one of the strongest local economies in the nation and Latinas are at the forefront. They run everything from one of the largest travel agencies in the area to the biggest microlender in the Southwestern United States to the city's largest tamale chain."

The referenced Latinas include Patricia Pliego Stout of the Alamo Travel Group; Janie Barrera from ACCION Texas; and Valerie Gonzalez of Delicious Tamales.

Without a doubt Latina business-owners will continue to flourish in the Dallas area and throughout the nation. "The fact that the corporate environment is welcoming doing business with Hispanic-owned and women-owned firms and they're part of the culture already for these corporations; that success in turn is what's fueling our growth and vision for continued growth in the small business arena," said Salma Gottfried, senior vice president of marketing at Dallas CVB.



Airside with plane on Terminal D at DFW.

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Ph: 703-531-1424

info@latinastyle.com

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