

## **LATINO LEADERS FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF ADVOCACY AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **LLEAD MICHIGAN - 2022 ANNUAL REPORT**

Soza, Vice President (Saginaw); Dr. Laura Gonzalez, Secretary (Mt. Pleasant); Leroy Hernandez, Treasurer (Holland); Dr. Sheila Contreras (East Lansing); Bobby Deleon (Saginaw); Esther Fifelski (Holland); Guillermo Lopez (Lansing); Juan Martinez (Okemos) Diana Rivera (Okemos); and Rebecca Sanchez (Sandusky).

Robert Anthony Alvarez continued to advise LLEAD Michigan as its General Counsel. His legal and judicial experience

#### **MISSION & PURPOSE**

LLEAD is a statewide Latino organization. Its mission is to unite Latinx communities in the state to exchange ideas on common issues and present unified solutions in resolving local, state, and national challenges. LLEAD and its chapters aim to provide the vehicle whereby local communities can coordinate, design, develop, and advocate for overcoming societal problems.

#### **THE CONTINUED URGENCY TO LLEAD**

The LLEAD Board of Directors continue volunteering to ensure their ongoing work toward creating a statewide Latino organization succeeds: that LLEAD works toward developing systems to resolve issues confronting the Michigan Latinx community. The 2022 eleven-member board of directors included the following: Al Flores, President (Perrinton); Danny Soza, Vice President (Saginaw); Dr. Laura Gonzalez, Secretary (Mt. Pleasant); Leroy Hernandez, Treasurer (Holland); Dr. Sheila Contreras (East Lansing); Bobby Deleon (Saginaw); Esther Fifelski (Holland); Guillermo Lopez (Lansing); Juan Martinez (Okemos) Diana Rivera (Okemos); and Rebecca Sanchez (Sandusky). Elections held resulted in changes in the Executive Board with Diana Rivera as Vice President and Rebecca Sanchez as Treasurer.

Robert Anthony Alvarez continued to advise LLEAD Michigan as its General Counsel. His legal and judicial experience and skills have proven to be an excellent asset for LLEAD. Mr. Alvarez is with the Avanti Law Group PLLC, Michigan's largest Hispanic and female-owned law firm serving the Latino community. Avanti Law often files suit against the government to protect residents' civil rights. Established in 2010 on Cinco De Mayo, they have six attorneys and 20 staff providing legal services in all areas of law.

#### **LATINO LEADERS MEET WITH MICHIGAN ATTORNEY GENERAL DANA NESSEL**

The LLEAD Legislative Committee coordinated a gathering with Michigan's Attorney General Dana Nessel on Monday, June 13, at the Fiesta Charra Mexican Restaurant in

Okemos. AG Nessel spoke to 55 Latinos from across Michigan on an outside patio on a beautiful Michigan summer day. Among the discussion items were the following:

- Voter suppression.
- Immigration.
- The disproportionate number of imprisoned Latinos.
- Laws protecting the LGBTQ.
- Other critical legal issues relevant to Latinos in the state.

Attendees were able to converse with both AG Nessel and her senior-level staff.

### **LLEAD: HISPANICS IN MICHIGAN CENSUS REPORT**

LLEAD Michigan, in partnership with the Hispanic Latino Commission of Michigan, authored a report in July 2022 regarding the 2020 U.S. Census entitled *Hispanics in Michigan*. LLEAD Board of Directors member, Juan Martinez, chaired the LLEAD Census Committee and ensured that the report reflected important information regarding Latinos. The report points out that the Hispanic population in Michigan has been growing in the last decade, reaching 564,422, according to the 2020 census. During this same period, Michigan's population reached a net increase of 193,691 residents, representing a 1.96 percent increase in 10 years. Hispanics accounted for a net gain of 128,064 inhabitants, representing a 29.35 percent increase in the state's Hispanic population from 2010 to 2020. ***It is important to emphasize that the net increase of 128,064 in the Hispanic population represents 66.1 percent of the total rise of Michigan's population.*** The growth of the Hispanic population in Michigan saved a federal congressional seat for Michigan. To review the entire report, please visit us at [www.llead.org](http://www.llead.org)

### **2ND ANNUAL LLEAD MICHIGAN GOLF OUTING**

The 2nd Annual LLEAD Michigan Golf Outing held at the Prairie Creek Golf Course in DeWitt, MI, on Friday, August 26, was a successful event. Leroy Hernandez, LLEAD Board of Directors - Treasurer, chaired the committee to coordinate and conduct this event. LLEAD encourages Latinos from throughout Michigan to attend its annual golf outings in future years. The golf outing is considered a fundraiser, and proceeds target to further the organization's mission, including covering expenses to maintain the LLEAD website, membership to funding organizational resources, and other annual organization expenses. The 4 "Eagle Sponsors" making the outing possible included: Team One Credit Union; Diana's Catering; Lake Trust Credit Union; and Professional Realtors of Holland. Amid the mask-optional event, COVID-19 nor gas prices deterred Michigan Latinos and our supporters from traveling to DeWitt for a day of golf, collaboration, fun, and relaxation. The outing ended with golfers enjoying delicious Mexican cuisine.

### **2022 MICHIGAN LATINO LEGISLATIVE DAY**

LLEAD worked with the Michigan Latino Legislative Caucus and other organizations to coordinate and present at the "2022 Michigan Latino Legislative Day" event conducted at the state capital on Wednesday, September 21. Board of Directors members Juan Martinez

and Al Flores, were part of the Legislative Day Planning Committee that coordinated the event. Lt. Governor Garlin Gilchrist and Michigan Latino Legislative Caucus members spoke at this event. Diana Rivera, Juan Martinez, and Al Flores conducted a presentation about LLEAD Michigan's work to those in attendance. They shared information regarding LLEAD's 2022 accomplishments and LLEAD's *Census Report on Hispanics in Michigan*.

## **2022 LLEAD STATEWIDE CONFERENCE**

The 2022 LLEAD Statewide Conference was held at the Okemos Conference Center in Okemos, MI, on Thursday, October 20, 2022. Guillermo Lopez, Lansing Chapter Chair and a LLEAD Board of Directors member, chaired the conference planning committee that designed and developed the event. Sponsors included the Presenting Sponsor, Team One Credit Union; Gold Sponsor, MSU Federal Credit Union; Silver Sponsor, Diana's Catering; Bronze Sponsor, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan; and Supporting Sponsors Thomas DeVries State Farm Insurance and Alec Garza, State Farm Insurance. The conference's theme was *Latinos in Michigan: Who we are and where we are going!* The Lunch Keynote Speaker was Delia Fernandez, Ph.D., an Associate Professor of Chicano/Latino Studies, College of Social Science and Department of History, MSU. Dr. Fernandez perfectly captured the conference theme essence by referencing the obstacles facing Michigan Latinos and equally important, the contributions and sacrifices Latinos have accorded Michigan residents, particularly in Michigan's agricultural work and serving as front-line workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. A Latino Legislative Breakfast brought together elected and appointed Latinx officials across the state. Plenary sessions and workshops presented included:

### **• Plenary Sessions:**

- 2020 Census Report of Latinos in Michigan (Marcelo Siles, Ph.D.; Isabel Montemayor-Vazquez, Ph.D; Juan Martinez, MSU emeriti)
- The Status of Latino LGBTQ Community in Michigan (Juan Carlos Vega, MLS, Activist/ Librarian, LLC)

### **• Workshops:**

- Civil Rights/EEO and Investigative Techniques (John Golaszewski)
- LGBTQ and the Latino Community (Juan Carlos Vega)
- Immigration 101 (Elinor Jordan, Esq., MIRC)
- Politics & Voting: Latinos in Michigan (Loida Tapia, Mi Poder)
- K – 12: Education of Latinos (Sheila Contreras, Ph.D., Rebecca Sanchez, Laura Gonzales, Ph.D.)
- Latinx Women Discussion: Mental Health & Other Important Issues (Magdalena Rivera)
- Criminal Justice Issues Affecting Michigan's Latinx Community (Bradley Hall, Esq., Jose Burgos, Elena Herrada, Philip Mayor, Esq.)
- Latinos Running for Office - Training (Robert Peña)

Diana Rivera, LLEAD Board Member, Librarian Emerita, Chicano Latino Studies MSU Libraries, concluded the conference with Summation and Closing Remarks. Diana expressed a Latinx acknowledgment of indigenous lands stating, "LLEAD Michigan begins and ends our conference by collectively acknowledging as visitors that we meet on the

traditional lands served by the 12 tribes of Michigan. By offering this Land Acknowledgement, LLEAD Michigan honors these ancestral grounds. It celebrates the resilience and strength that all Indigenous people have shown worldwide."

### **LLEAD STATE BOARD MEETS IN ADRIAN**

The LLEAD Michigan Board of Directors continued to meet predominantly via Zoom during 2022, except for the November 11 meeting held in Adrian and hosted by Latino Leaders. Rudy Flores, Adrian School District Board of Education Member and community activist, coordinated this meeting for the LLEAD Board and recruited 25 Latino and non-Latino leaders to participate in the monthly meeting agenda discussion items. Adrian elected and appointed officials attending this meeting, including the City of Adrian Mayor Angela Sword Health, Adrian School District Superintendent Nate Parker, NAACP representatives, and other Latino leaders. After the official forum, Adrian leaders requested that LLEAD Michigan consider the creation of a LLEAD chapter to represent the Adrian region. LLEAD board members responded that meetings would be scheduled to create a LLEAD Adrian Chapter.

### **LLEAD PARTNERS WITH VOTERS NOT POLITICIANS ON REDISTRICTING**

LLEAD's work to inform the Latino community members about the importance of the historic Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission was acknowledged by Lois Maharg, Community of Interest Outreach Program, Voters Not Politicians, as she thanked LLEAD in her statement, "The 2022 election results show that (for the most part) the new Redistricting maps let the voices of Michigan community members be heard in electing Michigan's state legislators and congressional representatives. We know that the maps were not perfect, but they were so much fairer than they would have been without the Commission's redistricting process."

### **LLEAD & TEAM ONE CREDIT UNION PARTNER TO "BANK THE UNBANKED"**

LLEAD and Team One Credit Union began discussions in 2022 regarding the possibilities of partnering to develop a project that would "Bank the Unbanked" in rural areas of Michigan. Many individuals and families do not utilize banking institutions to facilitate daily financial matters. This results in unaccountable, unsafe, and insecure cash transactions paying bills, buying their food and other necessary items, often putting the unbanked in precarious and dangerous situations. LLEAD and Team One will work to reach out to the unbanked to teach the safe use of electronic devices, enabling them to efficiently handle their monetary matters in an accountable, safe, and secure manner.

### **LLEAD & VOTERS NOT POLITICIANS: "PROMOTE THE VOTE" PETITION**

LLEAD facilitated sending Voters Not Politicians (VNP) volunteers with petitions to collect signatures for Proposal 2 of 2022 to be placed on the November 8, 2022, General Election

ballot. LLEAD hosted and introduced VNP volunteers to Latinx attendees at functions, including the MSU Dia De La Mujer Conference; Saginaw Cinco De Mayo Parade and Fiesta; and the Lansing Cristo Rey Church 3-day fiesta, among other events. Proposal 2 would amend the constitution to:

- Recognize the fundamental right to vote without harassing conduct
- Require military/overseas ballots to be counted if postmarked by election day
- Provide voter right to verify identity with photo ID or signed statement
- Provide voter rights to a single application to vote absentee in all elections
- Require state-funded absentee ballot drop boxes and postage for an absentee application
- Provide that only election officials may conduct post-election audits
- Require nine days of early in-person voting
- Allow donations to fund elections, which must be disclosed
- Require canvass boards to certify election results based only on the official records of votes cast

### **LLEAD ONGOING PROJECTS**

#### **• Judicial appointments on the state and federal levels (2020)**

LLEAD has partnered with the Michigan Hispanic Committee for Judicial Justice & Equity in recommending qualified Latinos to state and federal-level judicial appointments. On November 2, 2022, LLEAD sent letters to Governor Gretchen Whitmer supporting the selection of Bradley R. Hall to the Michigan Supreme Court without success. LLEAD recommended Abril Valdes Siewert for Judicial Vacancy (44th District Court Appointment) on December 22, 2022. LLEAD believes in the need for a fair and just criminal legal system that treats minorities and other vulnerable populations with respect and dignity and provides opportunities to help at-risk populations avoid jail and prison and avenues for incarcerated people to return home safely and successfully.

#### **• Intern Recruitment Project (2021)**

In 2022 LLEAD continued to recruit student interns from universities to work on projects enhancing the organization's mission by developing systems to better the lives of Latinos in the state. State Board member, Diana Rivera, initiated this vital endeavor and served as the chair of the LLEAD Intern Committee. Students are recruited and apply through university intern sites posting available intern positions. The committee interviews and selects intern applicants based on required skills and project interests that meet LLEAD's needs. Interns are paid for their work only if funds are available through the internship. Interns have worked on or will be working on the following projects in 2023: Running for Office and Training for Boards & Commissions; Online Statewide Latinx Directory; Repatriation Data Collection Project; Social Media Development and Refinement Project; Golf Outing Event; Biennial Training Conference; Bank The Unbanked Project; and other projects.

### **• Latinos Running for Office & Appointments to Boards & Commissions Training (2021)**

LLEAD Michigan recognized the need for Latinos to "be around the table" to become part of the decision-making process. The goal is to ensure that we develop formulas to determine the distribution of funds and other valuable life-changing solutions. Therefore, LLEAD developed training to assist Michigan Latinos running for office and appointments to boards and commissions on a local and state level. Robert Peña, Ingham County Commissioner, was responsible for adjusting and presenting the training for the first time at the 2022 LLEAD Statewide Conference. The project concentrates on researching misconceptions or hesitations in serving, particularly processes running for office or being appointed to a board or commission. This LLEAD Training Manual will assist Latinos interested in public office by creating a replicable framework for Latinos to advocate for their communities and issues relevant to community needs.

### **• Online Statewide Latinx Organizational Directory (2021)**

LLEAD continued to work on the Latino Organizational Directory in 2022. Diana Rivera and Dr. Laura Gonzalez, LLEAD Board Members, co-chaired the Directory Committee and partnered with HLCOM staff to identify necessary fields for inclusion. The name and type of organization (civil and human rights; cultural; arts; athletics; LGBTQ; political; business; immigration; advocacy; college scholarship; general services) and contact information were selected. The Directory will also refer victims of hate crimes, bias incidents, and unlawful discrimination to appropriate organizations/agencies. Committee plans include working with the LLEAD Website Developer for its proper design to provide efficient, user-friendly, and multi-platform access to the LLEAD website.

### **• LLEAD Michigan Strategic Planning (2020)**

LLEAD Michigan conducted a strategic planning session on September 2, 2022, to expand on the priorities selected in 2020 when Mr. Dante Villarreal, Vice President for Business & Talent Development Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce, facilitated the session and guided the Board members in outlining their goals and objectives. There were four priorities in 2020, and in 2022, the priority leaders were adjusted as follows:

- Funding: (Leader – Becky Sanchez) Identify priorities and the dollar amount to accomplish and meet LLEADs mission.
- Expertise Around Table: (Leader -Laura Gonzalez) Create a data pool of members and non-members with personal and professional expertise in areas that help meet LLEAD goals and objectives.
- Communications: (Leader – Diana Rivera) Build on LLEAD's existing social media platforms and strengthen electronic communication systems that will reach those in Michigan to work with LLEAD in meeting its mission.
- Pro-Active Advocacy: (Leader – Juan Martinez) Work in advocating for Latinos by creating activities/ projects that will form alliances with political and non-political

entities to resolve problems confronted by Latinos and develop partnerships for future ventures.

- 2022: Strengthen LLEAD Governance: (Leader - not yet selected)

- **LLEAD Website [www.llead.org](http://www.llead.org) (2017)**

Currently, this site shares LLEAD and its history, call to action, chapters, speakers bureau, crisis response, and conference information. The website hosts learning and teaching resources, the *Crisis Response Manual*, the Speakers Bureau, and recent local and state news of interest to the LLEAD mission. The page is open to the public and are invited to browse the Speakers Bureau for available speakers knowledgeable on topics affecting Latinos in Michigan.

- **LLEAD Speakers Bureau (2017)**

The Speakers Bureau is a Web-facing service for individuals and organizations seeking information from qualified and knowledgeable speakers. Latinx and other organizations (particularly non-Latino organizations, agencies, educational institutions, associations, and other groups) may request qualified speakers on Michigan Latino topics. Its goal is for Michigan residents to learn about Latinos' rich history in the state from February 12, 1781, when Spaniards arrived at Fort St. Joseph (now known as) Niles, Michigan. In 20th-century Michigan, the 1942-1964 Bracero Program brought Mexicans to work in Michigan's agricultural fields under the US-Mexico bilateral agreement. They, Mexican Americans, and Puerto Ricans also migrated for agriculture and industrial jobs and remained. With the arrival of the Caribbean and South American immigrants, the Latinx community grew, providing Michigan with a significant labor force and an active cultural community.

- **Creation of LLEAD Chapters (2017)**

The LLEAD Chapter Development Committee continues to work on developing chapters in the state. There were four LLEAD chartered chapters in 2022, including 1) Grand Rapids, 2) Holland, 3) Lansing, and 4) Saginaw.

5) South East Michigan Chapter: Al Flores, LLEAD State Board of Directors - President, signed the Charter Petition Form at the 2022 LLEAD Statewide Conference – Luncheon Ceremony. Brad Hall, Co-chair of the South East Michigan Chapter, presented the form for signature.

6) Adrian Chapter: Shortly after the November 11, 2022, LLEAD State Board of Directors meeting in Adrian, Juan Martinez, a LLEAD board member, worked with Rudy Flores from Adrian to coordinate the first meeting with Adrian Latino leaders to begin the discussions of creating a chapter. A meeting was held in person on December 15, 2022, to start building a LLEAD Adrian Chapter. After an extensive discussion regarding the benefits of having a chapter, the attendees signed the LLEAD Michigan Charter Petition Form. Juan Martinez,

who was in attendance, signed the form and presented it for approval at the meeting at the LLEAD Board of Directors January 13, 2023.

The work of chapters supports the LLEAD Michigan state-level Board to positively change and impact Latino issues at the state and national levels. If you want to create a LLEAD Chapter in your community, please contact Al Flores at: [alflo2@outlook.com](mailto:alflo2@outlook.com).