

League of Women Voters of Greater Las Cruces
Education Study Committee

Interview with Chambers of Commerce

Hispano Chamber of Commerce, April 5, 2011, 2-3 p.m., 1990 E. Lohman, Atrium Suite 207, Las Cruces, 88001

Chamber Members: Jesus Lozoya, chair, Education Committee and Gabriel Vasquez, Interim Director (now hired as Executive Director)

Committee Members: Sue Cain, Erika Graf-Webster, Roberta Gran, Judy McGuire, Jane Asche and Bonnie Burn

The mission of the Hispano Chamber is to provide a range of support services to small Hispanic businesses. This includes promotion of the Hispanic culture in the surrounding community and support of the education achievement of Hispanic youth as well as all students. Messrs. Lozoya and Vasquez indicated that the strength and passion of its members and number of volunteers were its most important assets.

The Hispano Chamber of Commerce and the Las Cruces Public School District (LCPS) cooperate in a limited way. The Chamber's signature program with LCPS is a quarterly event that recognizes LCPS middle school students for achievements in private or public service to the community, improvement in self, or overcoming a personal traumatic event. About 130 students are recognized each year. The Chamber does not have resources to do more than one program at a time. Messrs. Lozoya and Vasquez would like to develop a data base of contact information for these 130 students so that they could be followed through the school system and know what happened to them. Also, this group could be helpful in identify student's needs and wants.

At one time there was a Junior Achievement program for Southern NM; however, the program has been discontinued and the representative relocated. An ambassador program also has been discontinued because of lack of funding.

As the chair of the Education Committee, Mr. Lozoya mentioned the following as issues in education for the committee: teen pregnancy, racism, drugs, mentoring program, parental involvement, drop-out rate, literacy, work skills, and work ethics. In the present environment, there is a major disconnect between education and business. There is a need to educate the local business community to take some responsibility for educational needs.

Mr. Lozoya is a member of the board of directors of The Bridge of Southern New Mexico, an effort that originated in the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce, evolved into a non-profit organization, and has an executive committee and board of directors made up of educators, business people, local NM legislators and chamber members.

The Bridge of Southern New Mexico is a nonprofit organization that brings together business, economic development, government, and education to create a well-qualified workforce in Doña Ana County. It "bridges the gap" between young people searching for a career path and businesses seeking a skilled workforce. Increasing the high school graduation rate is a top priority. The Bridge developed the Early College High School that houses smaller learning communities (up to 500 students in grades 9-12) and

focuses on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) curriculum. Students may earn a specific certification or pursue a four-year degree.

[Source: The Bridge of Southern New Mexico, Internet, www.thebridgeofsnm.com]

(See Attachment 2 for History of Early College High School)

In developing its mission and vision statements, the Bridge included information from a 2007 workforce survey sponsored by Mesilla Valley Economic Development Alliance (MVEDA), an organization that promotes Doña Ana County as an attractive location for business and provides economic development and business assistance services, without charge, to all qualified economic-based employers seeking assistance.

In developing a qualified workforce, education and involvement of business with the educational system are parts of a complex puzzle. Serious issues affecting young people seeking a career include:

- Drug problems – students using drugs often drop out of school. They frequently can't find work because they cannot pass a drug test.
- Background checks – present another issue for those young people who have had trouble with law enforcement.

These two issues regularly make it necessary to interview 100 applicants to fill seven or eight positions.

- Literacy skills including communication skills – make it even more difficult for some applicants.
- Socio-economic problems – poverty, single parents, who may be working more than one job, and lack of adult supervision commonly lead to lack of discipline, opportunity to get into trouble, and delayed development of responsibility and work ethic in young people.

How can the Hispano Chamber help? The many issues that have been identified can only be resolved in “baby steps:--a linear movement toward resolution. The community must take ownership. A mentorship program for students, parental involvement, and programs to reduce the dropout rate were suggested.

A business/education program, Pay Back, begun in Clark County, Nevada, was mentioned by Mr. Lozoya.

Founded in 1996, the Summer Business Institute (SBI), represents a collaborative effort between the Clark County Human Resources Department, Clark County School District, the University of Las Vegas, and the local business community. The focus is to give youth opportunities to experience a corporate environment by working inside. SBI is an eight-week internship that includes business mentoring, life skills training, financial management, and a civic engagement project.

Incoming high school juniors, seniors and college freshmen are the targeted participants. A completed application and a high school transcript are required. Qualifying students are interviewed.

The students benefit both from on-the-job experience and workshops. The workweek is divided into two parts—the first four days consists of on-the-job training at job sites where supervisors provide them with meaningful projects. Fridays are workshop days where future career paths are introduced, and students receive information about entrepreneurial opportunities, and training about financial management and life skills.

As part of giving back each year, SBI interns are asked to participate in a civic engagement projects.

[Source: Summer Business Institute, Internet, www.clarkcountynv.gov]

Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce, April 7, 2011, 1-2 p.m., 760 W. Picacho Ave., Las Cruces, 88005

Chamber Member: Bill Allen, Executive Director

League Members: Sue Cain, Sally Christman, Roberta Gran, Erika Graf-Webster, Judy McGuire, Jane Asche and Bonnie Burn

The mission of the Chamber of Commerce is to support business in Las Cruces and Doña Ana County. It operates with an Executive Director and five staff members. The Chamber has 23 committees that work on particular topics (e.g., government and education). The committee chairs bring recommendations to the Executive Board and together the focus for the year is prioritized and a budget set. The Chamber recruits businesses as members.

The Education Committee, chaired by Steven Sánchez, Ph.D., who is also the Associate Superintendent, Division of Learning, Teaching and Research, Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS), oversees the educational interests of the Chamber. Leslie Cervantes, Special Liaison to Superintendent Rounds (LCPS), is also the Chambers First Vice-Chair and member of the Education Committee. In 2007, the Chambers education committee was instrumental in developing The Bridge that is now a non-profit organization named The Bridge of Southern New Mexico (see discussion on p. 1 and history in Attachment 2). The executive director of The Bridge is Tracey Bryan.

The Chamber partners with the Mesilla Valley Economic Development Alliance (MVEDA) to identify workforce needs in the community. In 2007, MVEDA sponsored a survey that produced data that became the mission and vision statement for the Early College High School (see discussion, p. 1 and Attachment 2).

A new Chamber partner is the Building Community Capacity for Excellence in Education (BC²E²), whose project coordinator is Michelle Valverde, NMSU, College of Education. The BC²E² project has two goals:

1. To establish and foster a broad spectrum of business, school, and community partnerships that build capacity in Las Cruces for increasing educational excellence.
2. To develop processes by which students, parents, and community members take greater and more effective ownership of education.

Round table discussions that included a variety of community members such as elected officials, business, non-profit representatives, and NMSU faculty were held on April 2, 2011, and May 14, 2011, from 3-5 p.m., on the NMSU campus.

“A community that begins talking openly across cultural, linguistic, and generational lines about what educational excellence is and why we need it, is a community that has taken the first vital step toward increasing student success.”

Michelle Valverde, Project Coordinator.

The Chamber, along with NMSU and LCPS, sponsored a two-day conference on literacy that brought together all groups in the community that are focusing on literacy. It was held on May 13-14, at NM Farm and Ranch Museum. This was an opportunity for organizations pursuing the same issue to share information and seek insight into future direction.

Annually a school principal, experienced teacher, and “rookie” teacher are recognized at a banquet where a Golden Apple is awarded.

There is no focused effort by the Chamber to unite business and students to provide them with opportunities to have a hands-on experience in the business world. There are no work study or internship programs sponsored by the Chamber. The greatest impact on education that was initiated by the Chamber was development of The Bridge program (see Attachment 2).



League of Women Voters of Greater Las Cruces

Questions for Chambers of Commerce

1. How does the mission of the Chamber relate to the mission of the Las Cruces Public Schools?

Mission of the Las Cruces Schools: *The Las Cruces Public Schools, in partnership with students, families, and the community, provides a student-centered learning environment that cultivates character, fosters academic excellence, and embraces diversity.*

2. What are the major programs through which the Chamber works as a partner with the public schools?
3. How did the Chamber and LCPS staff and teachers go about assessing needs within both organizations to determine how these programs would be mutually beneficial to both the school system and the business community?
4. How did you engage in joint planning to design programs that meet these needs?
5. What has proven to be the greatest challenges in achieving the goals of these programs?
6. How does the LCPS school system show appreciation and recognition for the contributions of the Chamber to these program initiatives?
7. How does the Chamber show appreciation for the work of the district staff and teachers in providing the best learning environment they possibly can for the students?
8. What are some of the most essential skills (and knowledge) that the Las Cruces business community looks for in young people who seek employment here?
9. What is the relationship of the Hispano Chamber with the new NM Department of Hispano Education. (For Hispano Chamber interview only.)
10. What is the position of the Chamber on limiting/restricting the work hours per week for students who are still in high school?

Premise statement:

There has been concern expressed that working long and or late hours at night may have a negative impact on students' success in school and then graduating.

In May

A Brief History of the Early College High School

In May, 2007, the Education Committee of the Greater Las Cruces Chamber of Commerce announced the Regional Education Initiative (REI) that brought together members from New Mexico State (NMSU), Doña Ana Community College (DACC), both chambers of commerce and several business owners. Patsy Duran was the chair of the Education Committee. The high student drop out rate from high school and the lack of a suitable workforce for community businesses spurred the effort.¹

In December 2007, the Mesilla Valley Economic Development Alliance (MVEDA) conducted a survey of Las Cruces employers regarding their satisfaction with their employees. Results of this survey indicated that specific skill levels were adequate, but problems with attitude, work ethic (punctuality, absenteeism, dress, interpersonal immaturity and inappropriateness) significantly compromised and depressed on-the-job performance. The general impression was that while employees weren't getting any worse, they weren't getting any better either.

In July, 2008, the president of the New Mexico State University, Michael Martin, announced that the REI would become The Bridge, a new organization that would have a board of directors made up of representatives of the public schools—Las Cruces, Gadsden and Hatch districts—as well as NMSU, DACC, the business community and government bodies of the City of Las Cruces and Doña Ana County. The goals of the effort were to reduce drop out rate, integrate the educational system with business, and include technical and career education in the curriculum. In discussion was building a technical school on the West Mesa and an “early-college high school” at the NMSU Arrowhead Research and Business Park.

The Bridge formally organized itself into a 501(c)3 nonprofit named The Bridge of Southern New Mexico that bridges the gap between young people searching for a career path and businesses seeking a skilled workforce. It's goals and objectives are described on p. 1.

The average national graduation rate of early college high schools around the county is 90%. Student who graduate pursue middle skill jobs that fit into the 21st century economy that require two-year degrees or certifications. The high school located in Las Cruces was made possible by New Mexico House Bill 33 that allows leasing the building for six years, paying only the low four-percent interest rate on the Certificate of Participation (COP) bonds, and lease payments do not begin until the building is occupied. The bridge offers dual credit courses for students who are “at risk” of dropping out, and working with business develops “learn and earn” opportunities for students through internships and mentorships. Construction is expected to be completed on the new high school by summer of 2011.

The freshman class of 116 began classes on July 6, 2010 and are temporarily housed within the DACC campus. By senior graduation date the Early College High School will educate 500 students.