

Alliance of Mexican Immigrants Abroad
Alianza de Inmigrantes Mexicanos en el Extranjero
San José Iturbide, Guanajuato, Mexico
March 16-20, 2006

Persons in Attendance

Alejandro Chavez
Phoenix, AZ

Luís De La Garza
Dallas, TX

Katy Fields
Kansas City, MO

Abraham Garza
Montreal, Canada

Raul Gomez
Laredo, TX

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Laredo, TX

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Nancy Guerrero
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José Maria (Chema) Marino
Santa Cruz, CA

José Martínez
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Ángel Morales
Minneapolis, MN

Enrique Morones
San Diego, CA

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Cleburne, TX

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Marta Samano
Los Angeles, CA

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Celaya, Gto., MX

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Celaya, Gto., MX

Description and Purpose of Visit

In January 2003, the administration of Mexican President Vicente Fox created the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IME) with the goal of connecting with Mexicans living abroad, specifically in the United States. An Advisory Council, which was created to assist the IME in the design and implementation of actions geared towards Mexican communities abroad, has become a meeting forum for Mexican and Mexican-American leaders who, in the past, were dispersed throughout in different coalitions of local and regional scope. It has become a bridge of communication between Mexican immigrant leaders and their Mexican-American counterparts. Also, it has served as a channel to articulate the needs and interests of important segments of Mexican communities in



A mariachi band serenades members of the Alliance of Mexican Immigrants Abroad (AIME) during their visit to the city of Tierra Blanca, Guanajuato. 19 March 2006.

the U.S. on a national level.¹

While one-third of the IME advisors are renewed every three years, most of those that reach their term limit feel their work in accommodating the unmet challenges of Mexican nationals living in the United States is far from complete. As a result, nearly 30 “ex-advisors” reunited on March 15, 2006, for four days in San José Iturbide. This city of approximately 54,700 people is in the northeast area of the state of Guanajuato, which is situated in the center of the country and is the home state of Mexico’s current president, Vicente Fox Quesada. The city of San José Iturbide was chosen as

the host site for this first meeting of ex-advisors because it is located in the poorest region of the state and is one of the poorest areas in Mexico, its mayor expressed interest in hosting the ex-advisors and worked closely with the coordinators to do so, and nearly 60 percent of residents in various northeastern cities of Guanajuato are now living in the United States, a phenomenon that has led to serious economic and emotional issues for those that remain. As was noted during the visit to Mexico, nearly every Mexican has, or knows of someone who has, a relative or friend living in the U.S.

At a Glance: Sending States of Mexicans in Missouri

According to the Mexican Consulate in Kansas City in April 2006, the most popular states in Mexico from which Mexicans residing in Missouri come are Chihuahua, Michoacán, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Veracruz, and Zacatecas.

At a Glance: About the Northeast Region of Guanajuato

Like the United States, Mexico is divided into states, of which there are 32. The AIME reunion was held in Guanajuato, a landlocked state located in the central area of the country. Guanajuato consists of 46 municipalities, equivalent to counties in the United States.

The AIME traveled throughout the northeast region of Guanajuato; visiting five of the eight municipalities. In each of these municipalities, the group met with the municipal president (mayor).

The municipalities and municipal presidents with which the AIME visited were:

- San Luis de la Paz (Sergio Ramón González Guerrero)
- San José de Iturbide (Javier de la Vega)
- Santa Catarina (Antonio Rojo)
- Tierra Blanca (Evaristo Hernández García)
- Victoria (Omar Chaire)

Having been invited to participate in this first meeting of ex-advisors for the Institute for Mexicans Abroad, otherwise known as the Alliance of Mexican Immigrants Abroad (AIME), Christina Vasquez Case, Alianzas director, and Katy Fields, Alianzas coordinator, joined the group with four primary goals. First, Alianzas hoped learn more about the IME, the AIME, and the work that is conducted on a bi-national level to accommodate the unmet challenges of Mexicans in the state of Guanajuato, Mexicans living in the U.S., and the U.S. communities that receive Mexican immigrants. Also, Alianzas sought to enhance its network of partners such as researchers, community leaders, and service providers. Second, Alianzas hoped to assess the possibility of establishing a sister city partnership between a city in Missouri and a city in Guanajuato. Third, Alianzas sought the possibility of establishing an exchange program between Missouri teachers and/or Missouri students and their counterparts in Guanajuato. Fourth, Alianzas intended to identify the possibility of instituting a cultural immersion program through which

¹ http://www.vdare.com/guzzardi/morales_doc.htm, found 24 March 2006.

Extension faculty and Missouri residents would directly experience the Mexican culture and indirectly be more effectively able to partner with Hispanic/Latino newcomers in Missouri.

Events of Significance

- ✓ Upon arrival in San José Iturbide, the AIME gathered at the mayor's house for a dinner and reception. A seven-member mariachi band serenaded the group; punctuated by songs to which the mayor and others sang. AIME representatives expressed their intent for the four-day visit in Mexico.

- ✓ For an inauguration ceremony, the AIME visited the only secondary school in the state where the government covers the cost of education. With nearly 850 students, *Escuela Secundaria Porvenir* (Future Secondary School) divides its classes into a morning session, which accommodates nearly 500 students, and an afternoon session, which accommodates nearly 350 students. The session that a student attends is determined by his or her level in school. The featured speakers at this inauguration ceremony included the governor of Guanajuato, Juan Carlos Romero Hicks, who stated that, in 2005, Mexico received over \$20 billion in remittances from the United States. As a result, remittance payments were second only to cash from oil exports as a source of income. Furthermore, 8.6 percent of those remittances were sent to the state of Guanajuato.²

Other speakers included Javier de la Vega Velásquez, mayor, San José Iturbide; Guillermo Lamadrid Álvarez, subsecretary, Social and Human Development; Jorge Navarrete Olalde, AIME advisor living in Cleborne, Texas; Rogelio Segundo, president, Pastoral del Migrante, Diocese of Celaya; Abraham Garza, AIME advisor in Montreal, Canada; Luis de la Garza, AIME advisor in Dallas, Texas; Nancy Guerrero, AIME advisor in Dallas, Texas; and Amalia Zepeda Hernández, director, Escuela Secundaria Porvenir.

- ✓ AIME's host, the municipal president of San José Iturbide, led a bus tour through the city's industrial parks, which emerged in the past decade. To train people for jobs in the industries, various technical schools were established in the area. Currently, the average daily wage for employees in these industrial parks ranges between approximately \$4.00 and \$7.00. However, the mayor stated that efforts are being made to narrow the wage gap for the employees.



Juan Carlos Romero Hicks, governor of the state of Guanajuato, Mexico, inaugurates the first annual gathering of the Alliance of Mexican Immigrants Abroad (AIME). 17 March 2006.



Katy Fields, Alianzas/UME/UMKC-IHD coordinator, speaks with Gov. Juan Carlos Romero Hicks during the AIME inauguration at Future Secondary School. 17 March 2006.

² http://aw.guanajuato.gob.mx/comunicados/comunicado_detalle.php?com_id=5094, found 29 March 2006.

At a Glance: Wages in Mexico

In Mexico

Due to substantive economic differences across regions in Mexico, the present minimum wage system consists of three general minimum wages applicable by geographic area. In 2004, the minimum daily wage in Zone A was 46.80 pesos (\$4.12), Zone B was 45.35 pesos (\$3.99), and Zone C was 44.05 pesos (\$3.87). However, few workers (approximately 15 percent) in 2004 earned only the minimum wage; most workers earned multiples of the minimum wage, and industrial workers averaged three to four times the minimum wage, earning more at larger, more advanced, and prosperous enterprises.*

In the United States

In 2004, the minimum hourly wage in the United States was \$5.15. However, the average hourly wage was \$17.00.

* Author's note: In 2004, the average of the minimum wages across all three zones was 45.40 pesos per day (\$4.00). Therefore, "three to four times the minimum wage" translates to 136.20 to 181.60 pesos per day (\$11.99 to 15.98).

- ✓ In four days, the AIME held five *mesas de trabajo* (work tables) in five different towns. These *mesas de trabajo* allowed residents to meet one-on-one with the ex-advisors and discuss any problems or concerns they had about immigration and/or issues related to family or friends living in the U.S. What follows are a few of the cases that were presented during the *mesas de trabajo*.
- A father told of his son who went to Tennessee for work and became the family's source of financial support. The father said that his son was killed in Tennessee by another Mexican who he believed was currently living in Guanajuato. Although the father knew the alleged killer, the latter was not yet been brought to justice and, as a result, the family did not experience closure.
 - A woman traveled nearly two hours by foot and bus with her children to meet with the ex-advisors. She explained that her husband was killed by Minutemen and the alleged killer(s) had yet to be punished.
 - A woman spoke of her husband and his involvement in the Bracero program nearly 40 years ago. Although he had since died, she wondered if it was possible to receive the earnings that he never received through the program.
 - A father spoke of his three sons who lived in Ohio and worked in a restaurant there. The restaurant recently closed and did not pay the sons for their final month of work.
 - A man wanted to know if he was entitled to any benefits for an injury he incurred while working for a construction company in Texas. He had received worker's compensation and had been released to return to work.
 - A woman told of her son who went to the United States nearly 15 years ago to find work, although she has not heard from him since. She did not know if he died while trying to cross the border; if he was still working in the U.S. and, if so, where; or if he tried to return home and died while trying to cross the border.
 - Because her daughter was born in the United States, a woman was under the impression that, upon her eighteenth birthday, her daughter would be forced to join the United States military.



AIME representatives meet with residents of San José de Chilar. 18 March 2006.

At a Glance: The Minuteman Project

The Minuteman Project is a private border security project begun in April 2005 by a group of private United States citizens with the purpose of monitoring and preventing the flow of illegal immigrants across the United States-Mexico border by alerting the United States Border Patrol.

Supporters claim that the U.S. Border Patrol is spread too thinly and is unable to adequately fulfill its duties. Rather than contacting or directly confronting suspects, organizers state that the Project's policy is only to observe suspected aliens and then report those observations to the Border Patrol.

Critics claim that the Minutemen have proven to be nothing less than a gang of anti-Mexican racists and their actions have the potential of alienating Mexico, its government and the millions of Americans of Mexican background. They believe that Minutemen are not well-supervised and inclined to take the law into their own hands, which includes unlawfully detaining, and/or committing violent acts against people who they think are immigrants.

At a Glance: The Bracero Program

The Bracero Program (1942 through 1964) was an agreement between the U.S. and Mexican governments that permitted Mexican citizens to take temporary agricultural work in the U.S. This managed migration was prompted by the enormous manpower shortage created by World War II. Over the program's 22-year lifespan more than 4.5 million Mexican citizens were legally hired for work in the United States, primarily in Texas and California. Mexican peasants, desperate for paid work, were willing to take farm jobs at wages scorned by most Americans, who had moved into the better-paid war industries. The Bracero Program helped establish what became a common migration pattern: Mexican citizens entering the U.S. for work, going home to Mexico for some time, and returning again to the U.S. to earn more money.

The workers who participated in the Bracero Program have generated significant local and international struggles challenging the U.S. government and Mexican government to identify and return deductions taken from their pay from 1942 to 1948 for savings accounts which they were legally guaranteed to receive upon their return to Mexico at the conclusion of their contracts. Many, if not most, never received their savings.

- ✓ The municipal president of San Luis de la Paz, Sergio Ramón González, discussed a newly initiated insurance program for Mexican migrants living anywhere in the United States. The program offers life insurance and the repatriation of remains. The insurance would pay \$10,800 to the applicant's beneficiary and also cover the costs of mortuary fees. While the application fee is \$60, the government of the municipality of San Luis de la Paz will pay half of the fee (\$30.00) for its residents the first year of coverage.
- ✓ The AIME attended an informal, outdoor performance by the group *Caracol de Fuego* (Conch of Fire). Its members, Marcelino Ramírez, Galvan Gonzalo Gómez



No nos dejes solos / Don't leave us alone. Cover design of a brochure promoting a life insurance program for Mexican migrants living in the United States.

and Nestor Vargas Rivas, have “composed music which is devotional; a rich tapestry of sound in honor of their ancestors and gods. Incorporated into their performances is the complete array of flutes, drums, trumpets and other Mesoamerican instruments found in a Native Mexican music ensemble. Their vocals are haunting and capture the melancholy of the Plains Indians of America’s southwest.”³

- ✓ March 19th, which coincided with the final day of the AIME in Mexico, is internationally known as El Día de San José (Saint Joseph’s Day). Because the AIME lodged in the city of San José Iturbide, whose namesake is San José, celebrations were especially significant. Crowds of people arrived in the city on the eve of Saint Joseph’s Day and slept on sidewalks so that they would be in town to sell their goods the next day. Beginning at five o’clock in the morning, bands played live music, fireworks were ignited, and church bells rang enthusiastically. Merchants filled the street selling, among other things, freshly baked breads, seasoned meat with tortillas, sweets, CDs, and clothing. A boxing ring was constructed in the main plaza and youth of all ages competed throughout the afternoon and evening. The coronation of Miss San José Iturbide was held on the same stage from which bands entertained the crowd of nearly 5,000 people. Also, the mayor publicly recognized and presented an award to each member of the AIME in honor of his/her efforts and work in Guanajuato.



The group Caracol de Fuego (Conch of Fire) introduces AIME representatives to an array of Mesoamerican instruments.

Outcomes of the Visit

- ✓ Alianzas was provided the opportunity to learn more about the IME, the AIME, and the work that is conducted on a bi-national level to accommodate the unmet challenges of Mexicans in the state of Guanajuato, Mexicans living in the U.S., and the U.S. communities that receive Mexican immigrants. Alianzas expanded its network of partners such as researchers, community leaders, and service providers on a tri-national level.
- ✓ Alianzas identified the opportunity of establishing of a sister city partnership between a city in Missouri and San José Iturbide, Guanajuato. Mayors have expressed interest in a partnership and Alianzas has offered to help with its development.
- ✓ Alianzas identified the opportunity of establishing an exchange program between University of Missouri Extension staff, Missouri teachers, and/or Missouri students and their counterparts in Guanajuato. Individuals and groups in Mexico that have expressed interest in this partnership include Amalia Zepeda Hernández, director, Escuela Secundaria Porvenir; and the University of San José Iturbide.

³ Music in Motion, <http://www.musicmotion.com/product.htm?pid=429063>, found 30 Mar 2006.

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