

EXPLORING IMMIGRATION

Module 4

SPEAKER It's a beautiful day to become a citizen. 00:00:12

CROWD APPLAUSES 00:00:16

MUSIC PLAYS 00:00:40

MAN #1 It's not only public education that has been significantly affected by dramatic changes in immigration demographics, city and county governments are dealing with the new realities as well. 00:00:52

MAN #2 I've been with Ottawa County for 13 years and when I came to Ottawa County, Ottawa County was just starting to building to the 20 and 25% growth rate. At that time there was a lot of contention between rural and urban areas, because there was a lot of spillover from the urban areas into suburban, rural America. 00:01:12

During that time period our department grew from a one-man operation to actually 8 people, who are now doing land use, economic development, environmental planning. Well Ottawa County over the last 5 decades has grown in double digits every decade, typically anywhere between 15 and 25%. From 1990 to 2000 we grew by about 21%, that was about 50,000 people. We are now at 260,000. 00:01:41

The unique thing about Ottawa County is that we have 5 major urban centers that are adding to growth pressure in our rural areas. Most counties have 1 single urban center. And that is even – that – that growth is compounded as far as problematic situations are concerned, because we're also the largest agricultural producer in the state of Michigan and one of the largest in the nation. 00:02:05

Michigan, and Ottawa County in particular, has always depended on a migrant population that was – it was typically moving into an area during the harvesting months and moving back out after the harvest was completed. 00:02:20

What we've seen in recent years, and particularly from the 1990 census to the 2000 census is our Hispanic population has grown by 110%. So what we're getting to see is actually the migrant workforce and their families beginning to settle down and stay in the community and become a part of the community. 00:02:42

As our migrant population has begun to settle in west Michigan and Ottawa County in particular, one of the land use challenges that we face is affordable housing. Ottawa County has one of the higher per capita income rates in the nation, and as a result our housing stock reflects that. 00:03:01

So what we've seen in recent years is our urban areas, primarily along the lakeshore, Grand Haven and Holland city, focusing on that particular issue. And planners, community leaders and policy makers, elected officials have all come together and are addressing that issue in a way that hasn't had to be faced in the past. 00:03:23

NARRATOR Migrant labor helped make Ottawa County one of Michigan's most productive agricultural regions. It also helped make Holland one of the most popular summer tourist destinations in the Great Lakes region. 00:03:40

But as the immigrant population grew and many seasonal workers decided to become a permanent part of the community, A new social environment was created; one that forced government agencies to adopt new policies and procedures that better served a diverse population. 00:04:04

MAN #3 Well, being with the department for 33 years now, I will first recognize the previous Police Chief who came here from the outside

and aggressively – he recognized that the community was going to change and so he aggressively recruited Hispanic officers. 00:04:24

And I've seen that, I've been part of that, and I've continued to do that as the Police Chief currently. And so, because we see the need that we have to become diversified in our own organization to serve the diverse community that we live in. 00:04:44

So we have really worked at recruiting individuals of the different races which I described earlier, and along with that it's very beneficial to have those officers work in the community with these individuals. We – we work very hard and train at understanding the different cultures. 00:05:03

And the officers that we have that are the different – from the different races can also explain it to us as we work with them side by side. And obviously when you have a Hispanic officer that can speak Spanish, that's very beneficial when we're dealing with a crisis or an investigation that's immediately ongoing. 00:05:27

The way we police in our community has changed tremendously in 33 years. I remember when I started as an officer working a patrol car in the '70's and '80's, we were very much a react-to-the-call type of a police department. We'd get called, we'd go, handle the situation and - and leave. 00:05:50

The concept of community policing not only grew here but it grew nationwide very quickly, and community policing is - is whatever you make it to be. And so in the mid '90's we were able to obtain some grants and hire some extra officers, and we started what we call community policing in Holland; where we put designated officers in neighborhoods, small neighborhoods so those individuals that live there got to know the officer personally. 00:06:25

We took the officers out of those cars. Their faces became clear, recognizable individuals to our community and things changed;

because we were having some issues with the youth gangs at that time. And so we identified neighborhoods that we felt needed this officer presence on a personal basis and it - it – it just took off and it was very successful. 00:06:53

MAN #4 There were not a - a lot of Latinos back at that time, at least it didn't seem in New Zealand when I was growing up. And in Holland there – there were more Latino – there was a - more of a Latino population. But I – I have seen quite a transformation over the course of – from 1984 when I was hired in here to the current – to right now as far as the diversity that's taken place in the city of Holland or for – for that fact for the whole county – the county of Ottawa and Holland city. 00:07:24

What prompted the – the community policing was we were starting to see various problems in certain neighborhoods here within – not far from the police department which were of concern. One of them was this gang problem that had developed back in 1991, and it was escalating. 00:07:41

I was in charge of a particular neighborhood. It was very – it was probably to me one of the most challenging parts of – of being a police officer right here in Holland and - and I've done many things here. That was probably the most challenging because it was not easy – easy going from being reactive in the police car to getting out on foot, bike and - and actually you're – you're getting right down into the sort of wallowing in - in the dirt, talking with people, sitting down with people, dealing with quality of life issues, not necessarily criminal issues; but eventually that came with getting to know people. 00:08:24

So it was very – very rewarding, very - it benefitted me a lot in - in many ways. Many contacts were established. Some contacts were developed as criminal – or, um, excuse me as informants, confidential sources providing information to cases. 00:08:42

MAN #5 What I do now - after I got out of the Detective Bureau I came into the Community Policing Unit, which now we call it – there's six of us, it's called TAC Officers, Team Area Coordinators. 00:08:55

My usual day starts from either going to briefing and then from that point on we'll go in our cars. Part of my job is to go to the neighborhoods, to the schools for programs. A lot of the times this is what we wear during the summer just to be more comfortable. Sometimes that's what we do details on bikes to be more close to – to be out away from the car so we can meet the neighbors and we get to know them better. 00:09:27

Other times we go on foot around the neighborhoods, depending if we have some problem areas. A couple of us will go on foot and start talking to neighbors and getting to know them better or just making our presence known to the – to the – to that area so they realize that we're going to be more attentive to what's going on in that – in that area. 00:09:54

When there is a – a neighborhood that's, especially at some of the apartment complexes where we have a lot of drug activity or gang activity, then we try to saturate that with us, working with other patrol officers and trying to do more – more of a presses or just do some stings; concentrate on that area and – either by obtaining – serving warrants or just trying to get more information from them, from the other neighbors in the area. 00:10:30

Being you know of Mexican heritage has helped me because the way I work with people. Yes, I build a lot of trust in the Hispanic community. I've developed those ties with the Hispanic community. I'm also involved in Hispanic organizations, on committees, and also we're mentorship to some of the local kids. 00:10:57

So I've been involved with – and my name is known, and the trust – we've developed this trust between the community and myself and some of the other Hispanic officers that has helped us in our job;

because not only as a police officer – we don't just enforce the criminal aspect, but also we are like a social – like a social service agency because we get involved with the families, we do referrals to other community service. 00:11:31

NARRATOR And it is not always government action that is needed to help a community deal with the new realities. 00:11:40

FEMALE #1 I personally did not like living in a Wonder Bread community. And I also was highly offended by the apparent intolerance that existed, and I felt strongly that those of us that supported diversity needed to be visible, to counter that intolerance. And I knew that there were lots of folks like me who were very committed to the value of diversity. 00:12:05

So the question was, how do we organize that? And as a person who was involved in some justice work, I became aware of a family who had left the community because they never felt welcomed into the life of the community, an African-American family. 00:12:22

And I said this is 1996, this can't be happening, and we need to create an opportunity and a vehicle for people who value diversity to be visible. And yet there was no group that was responding, there was no diversity initiative in our schools, there was no diversity initiative in our governments, there was nothing that was happening to say that this 98% white community was working hard to eliminate racial barriers. 00:12:50

NARRATOR In addition to organizing and sponsoring a very successful annual day-long summit on racism for the past 20 years, the alliance provides year-round services that include basic assistance to a community with basic needs; such as Spanish language training. 00:13:14

FEMALE #2 [SOUNDS AS IF SHE IS A TEACHER IN A CLASSROOM SETTING] The AR – the infinitive AR and you're going to add on one of these,

depending on the pronoun. So you have a sentence, right? Okay.
00:13:22

What we hope to accomplish in the class is to help people start learning a little bit of pronunciation, how to read words if they see something, if they have forms that are in Spanish which a lot of people do, being able to even read the words and pronounce them correctly; even getting over that initial fear of language; and that's such a big thing in learning and it makes such a difference to the clients. 00:13:46

The students in the class come from a wide variety of different positions in the county. Some of them are police officers, and some of them work in environmental inspection positions. So what I try and do in the class is open it up for them. 00:14:00

I always give them opportunity; are there more specific words that relate to your position. And I encourage them to go back to their positions, go back to their desk or to their patrol car and look around and say are there documents and are there words in Spanish that are already in your place of employment that maybe you just didn't notice before; and try and start learning those words. And so no matter what position they are in in the county serving the people, they'll be able to start gaining their own vocab. 00:14:33

FEMALE #3 One of the first charges I was given when I came on board here at Ottawa County was to conduct a needs assessment on training needs for all of our employees. And I spent the first 2 to 3 months in all of our various departments and divisions with – in our Sheriff's office, in our Court system, with the Health Department, Mental Health, in all of our administrative offices, really looking at where are the needs; how can we better serve our population here in Ottawa County.
00:14:57

And one of the topics that came up every time was the need for not only diversity training and an awareness of these cultures that are

part of our county now, but a great need for Spanish language training so that they could communicate better with our Hispanic population. 00:15:12

The very first class that we offered filled in 10 minutes; we had such a demand for the class. People had been waiting a very long time to be able to take these classes at work. 00:15:27

Our employee population is really not a very diverse group. We have probably less than 10% minority population in our employees. But as the county continues to grow and have a much larger minority population, we continue to add minority employees and – and are hoping to do so; and we certainly want to serve our minority population. 00:15:47

FEMALE #4 I have grown up in this area. And in the 45 years that I've lived here, there's definitely been a change in the composition of our population. In Ottawa County we probably have about 8% of our population that is Hispanic, but there are pockets within our county, like the city of Holland, where we are approaching possibly 30% of that population is Hispanic. 00:16:09

And we need to tailor our services culturally, as well as by language, to that population. And so to be – to be able to be bi-lingual, but also to be culturally sensitive to how the culture affects their health and affects their health decisions and how they seek out health care, is - is something that we need to understand in order to be able to have a healthy community. 00:16:38

They call my number. I don't speak Spanish and I'm trying to help an uninsured woman who feels like she has a lump in her breast. What is she going to do? She doesn't have a job, she doesn't speak English, and she's on the other end of my phone. 00:16:53

I need to increase my ability to communicate with her, to give her compassion, to find services for her, and to know that she

understands what I'm saying. I asked to take this class, and - and I think our department recognizes that it's important for us to be able to have that communication and that connection with the - with the growing Hispanic population in our county. 00:17:11

There's always been the challenge of when that migrant – migrant population comes in. And if we get called to a call there, there's difficulty in maybe communicating what the problem is, where the problem is, if there's a large population at that particular camper and that particular community, to even figure out who's involved. 00:17:28

And – and in more recent years, as people have started to stay year round and maybe have found jobs on other farms or in different factories or something like that and then go back to the agricultural in the fall, we're finding more of that year round. That you might respond to a call, respond to a household, respond to an area where it's primarily a Hispanic and only Spanish speaking; and that's a challenge when I – I haven't been exposed to Hispanic populations until I became a - a police officer. So very - very little Spanish, very little knowledge of their culture. 00:18:02

To this class I found when I was responding to a – a primarily Hispanic population or community or household, a lot of times we were having to pull a child. They would get a child out of bed or they would bring him you know from another home or another place to – to be the translator; and a lot of times that was upsetting because there is maybe things you don't want to discuss with a child, and unfortunately you have to you know relay that through them. 00:18:25

So for me I felt that it was essential to let that population know that – that I'm trying. I, you know I'm going to do my best to at least figure out a little bit of what's going on. 00:18:37

[CHILDREN SINGING 'THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND'] 00:19:16

Exploring ImmigrationProgram 4

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