

Welcome to Puertas Abiertas!

On September 23, 2004, an invitational meeting was conducted to promote a better understanding of the Hispanic community in the Northeast Tennessee region. “Puertas Abiertas a la Comunidad Hispana” (Open Doors to the Hispanic Community) resulted in questions raised by regional community government, healthcare, business and agency leaders who wanted more information about Northeast Tennessee’s expanding Hispanic community.

This pamphlet describes responses to questions about the regional Hispanic community.



The participants at the meeting, watching a traditional Mexican dance.



Jarabe Tapatío as performed by two local young people.



Bruce Behringer and Juan Chiu planning the day's agenda.

We are so grateful for people like you, who take the time to learn about the Hispanic community of Northeast Tennessee. There are many agencies and organizations becoming more interested in Hispanics. They are discovering that not only are we hard workers, but we are an excellent market, so more resources and services are starting to reach our community. This region values a strong work ethic and has a growing appreciation of our culture and people. So like so many other new residents over the centuries, Hispanics are finding that Northeast Tennessee is a nice place to live and raise families. Many thanks for your interest in our community.

— “Puertas Abiertas a la Comunidad Hispana” Steering Committee

Getting in Touch with the Hispanic Community

**These persons and organizations are points of contact
with the region's Hispanic Community.
We invite you to call and look forward to working with you!**

Group/Organization	Contact Person	Phone # (423)	Area of Interest
East Tennessee State University Language & Culture Resource Center www.etsu.edu/cas/lcrc/home.htm	Ardis Nelson	439-6897	Bilingual newspaper project, AMIGOS for elementary children, Translation and interpretation services
Migrant Education Summer Project for Children	Hillary Hester	439-8342	Summer program for migrant children
Migrant Education Recruiter	Juan Chiu	341-5642	Finding migrant youth and providing education opportunities
Washington County Health Department	Blanca P. Taylor, R.N.	979-4613	Targeted TB Testing Coordinator, Communicable and Environmental Disease Surveillance (CEDS)
Coalición Hispano-Americana de la Salud (CHAS)	Holly Melendez	439-4081	Health education and interventions in the Hispanic community
Telamon Migrant Head Start	Silvia Fregoso	743-2028	Caring for/educating the children of migrant farmworkers
WETS-FM 89.5	Juan Chiu	439-6440, 1-888-895-WETS	Spanish Radio Programs: Ritmo Latino and Entérate
Catholic Charities	Alma Vázquez	913-8072	Church/charity-related services for Hispanic community
Downtown Clinic/Clinic at Scott's Farms	Mary Kay Anderson	439-4051	Health care services and education
Latin American Club	Lucy Velez	239-7812	Cultural events and general community education activities
Club Amistades	Sherry Adon	926-5108	After school programs and adult education
Contacts for Community Partnerships Programs between ETSU and Hispanic Community	Mary Kay Anderson Ardis Nelson Bruce Behringer	439-4051 439-6897 439-7809	Partnership with Hispanic community including faculty and student efforts

The Northeast Tennessee Hispanic Community

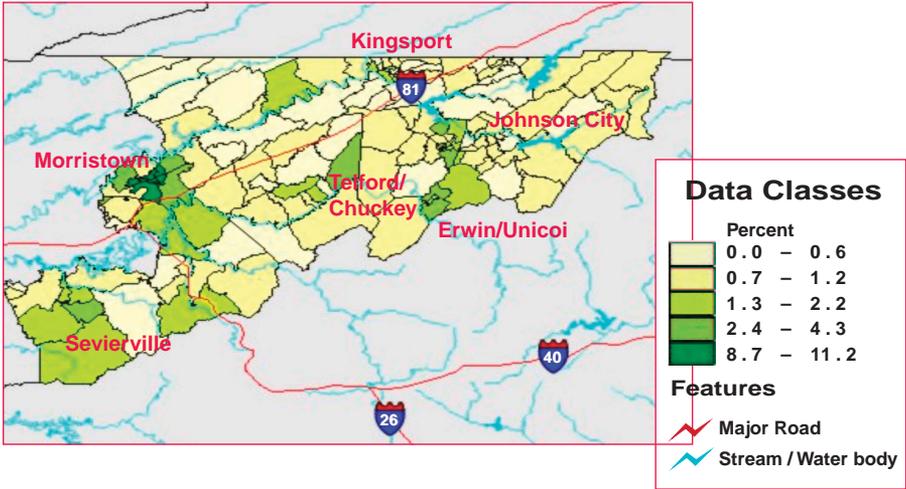
What is the actual population of Hispanics in the region?

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, there are about 5,000 Hispanics in Upper East Tennessee. When Hamblen, Sevier and Jefferson counties are added, there are more than 10,000 persons of Hispanic origin and several thousand more during the summer season. The community includes U.S. citizens from Puerto Rico, immigrants from Spain, and Central and South American countries, and migrants who obtain temporary work visas primarily for agricultural work. More than 62 percent of the Hispanics in Northeast Tennessee are from Mexico.

It is difficult to find accurate data for the total population. No combined immigrant and migrant population census has ever been attempted. We know though, that there were over 3,000 agricultural workers in Hamblen County alone in the summer of 2004. Counts have been made to identify eligible persons for special service programs like the East Tennessee Migrant Education Program in 2004 that found close to 2,000 children (ages 2-21) who qualified for services by being in the U.S. for less than three years and they or their parents work in agriculture. Even the most rural regional counties like Johnson County are seeing growth. The Census map below shows the percentage of Hispanics in the region. The percentages are highest in Morristown/Hamblen County, Unicoi County, Johnson City/Washington County, Kingsport, Eastern Greene and Western Hawkins counties and parts of Cocke and Sevier counties.

What is the projected population growth rate for Hispanics in our area in 15 years?

The size of the Hispanic population in the United States is expected to grow by 44% by 2025. Hispanics can find jobs here in construction, restaurants, manufacturing and agriculture. Most Hispanics in this region live in families that continue to grow very quickly; it is common for us to have 4 to 6 children.



Right now, new immigration laws are still being discussed and written. As laws become more clearly defined, it will be easier to determine the impact on this region's population. The current Administration's proposal, though seen as helpful today, could change tomorrow.

Needs and Services

How can the larger Northeast Tennessee and Hispanic communities help the Hispanic community to be productive members of the region?

First, we need to understand that Hispanics face the same challenges and difficulties as everyone else across the region. An understanding of how we are similar and different will help us develop ideas to improve community relations. Further, we propose that the regional community embrace the following ideas as ways to contribute to the growth of the local Hispanic community that will in turn add to this region:

- ▲ Hispanics who live in Northeast Tennessee are diverse. We are from different countries, from a range of economic levels and have diverse educational and social backgrounds. Just like the overall region's residents, we need affordable rental housing, loans for the purchase of cars and homes, support to pursue higher education, and after school programs for children of working parents.

Local professionals Macrina Gosnell, Silvia Fregoso, and Blanca Taylor at the Puertas Abiertas meeting.



- ▲ We need more access to educational opportunities. Bilingual programs are needed for both the school-age children and for adults. We recognize that being bilingual is a social, cultural and economic advantage and we seek to achieve "the American dream."
- ▲ We can contribute to the cultural diversity and economic strength of this region as is occurring now, all across Tennessee and the United States. Hispanics have strong family and community values. We supply much of the agricultural labor in the region and have become dependable workers in construction, manufacturing, farming and services. One can also see the positive economic impact of Hispanics in forming new businesses that promote our cultural products and foods.
- ▲ We want to become partners in progress. Our community wants to contribute to community events and enjoy Northeast Tennessee just as other residents do.



The parents of Telamon Migrant Head Start write books about their lives for their children.

Medical and Healthcare

What are Hispanic cultural beliefs in regards to the health of children and infants? Are there special women’s health issues? What do health professionals need to know and understand to encourage good health practices?

It is important for health professionals to understand that both our men and women need to be educated about how to prevent serious illnesses that occur commonly with Hispanics. We want to learn how to access screening services and recognize symptoms. The healthcare system here is very different than in our home countries. Here, there are many programs and different insurance requirements. No one seems to know all the rules and changes in the rules are confusing. Health departments have been very helpful in explaining how and where to get needed services, particularly because they employ bilingual staff. Obtaining health insurance and services for children through TennCare is sometimes difficult, especially for those who were not born in the U.S. There are services available, but we need to organize how our community members can use them by working with the hospitals, health departments and other offices.

How we are different: Hispanic cultural beliefs and healthcare experiences are different and vary:

- ▲ In Latin American countries, many medications are available over the counter that here are only available by prescription.
- ▲ Hispanic people are famous for using home remedies, and there are some that work and some that don’t.
- ▲ One cultural belief regarding our children and infants is that if they are fat, they are seen as pretty and healthy, while a slim baby or child *must be sick*.
- ▲ Traditionally, our women stay very busy in the home, and are not encouraged to be physically active. Therefore, many women experience weight gain and risk factors for developing chronic illnesses in the future.
- ▲ We are generally private about sickness and often postpone getting care because we either fear the diagnosis or expect that home remedies or time will cure our ailment.

Our biggest need: Hospitals should develop a plan to hire bilingual people and train them to become interpreters and translators in the medical field. Mistakes or unprofessional interpretation could occur and are dangerous for patients. Motivating more Hispanic students to finish school and choose healthcare careers would prepare more Hispanic healthcare workers and would benefit both the local community and the Hispanic population.

Education

What knowledge, skills, or dispositions do you think teachers and parents need in order to ensure that all Hispanic children are successful? How can we increase the high school graduation rate of Hispanics and ensure they are prepared for challenges of higher education?

There are many barriers for Hispanic students. Some do not feel welcome in their local high schools. We need your help to ensure that all students and faculty embrace and accept those from other cultures, and to celebrate the differences rather than discriminate against those who are more recent immigrants to this country. If Hispanic high school students felt



more accepted and welcomed they would be more likely to graduate. Teachers could learn about the cultures of our families and include activities that involve children and families in projects that share their culture. When teachers learn basic Spanish phrases to communicate with their students, they build relationships more quickly. Another barrier is lack of knowledge. We need to understand that our children are protected by laws that require communication from the schools to the parents in the native language of the parent and that no child under 18 can be denied an education. However, this can present another barrier. Some Hispanic children (those not born in the U.S.) are not legally eligible to attend higher education or work after graduation. This reduces their motivation to complete school. Teachers and policy makers can address this issue by encouraging support for actions like the proposed national DREAM Act now before the U.S.

Congress. Proposed new laws would allow these students to attend state institutions at state rates and be eligible for Legal Permanent Residence upon graduation. http://www.nilc.org/immlawpolicy/DREAM/DREAM_Basic_Info.pdf.



How we are different: In some families, parents want and need their older children to work to help support the family. And in other families, parents are unaware of the importance of further education and the opportunities to which their children have access. Promoting education must start with the parents! Schools could provide important information by either having bilingual meetings during which parents can learn about requirements and opportunities for their children or publishing brochures/documents to distribute to parents. Because the educational systems and languages are so different, many Hispanic parents do not know what is required for their children to succeed in schools in the U.S. and some do not know how to help children with their homework because of the language barrier. The majority of teachers in this region are very open and willing to help and parents are appreciative of their efforts. We also need to address how important it is for Hispanic students to maintain their native language even as they learn English, and make them aware of the benefits of being bilingual.



Our biggest need: It would be helpful to expand English as a Second Language (ESL) programs and provide teachers and interpreters for children who are new in the school systems. The members of the Hispanic community could be helpful in volunteering to help in schools. It would also help to establish and publicize GED courses in Spanish.

Telamon Migrant Head Start Children using their active imaginations (future engineers).

Banking and Starting Businesses

How can we best increase the relations between the Hispanic community and the banking community of East Tennessee? Are there individuals that would like to start their own business or expand a business?

The best way to increase relations between the Hispanic community and banking community is to provide access to banking services and resources. The community would use loan, savings, checking, and money transfer services. Materials in Spanish would be valuable. Some

of the region's Hispanics are interested in starting our own businesses but need to learn how. Information and seminars could be offered through chambers of commerce, banks, and government (Small Business Administration). Business mentoring programs (using volunteer retired business persons) would give the personal help that Hispanics respond to the best. Some Hispanics may need additional language training and classes before entering business. Classes to improve their reading, writing and mathematics skills should be offered.

Our biggest need: Hispanics need access to banking and checking accounts. Officials of banking institutions should know that it is not legally necessary to require social security numbers, and that banks can accept other forms of identification from those that want to open accounts or use other banking services. Some area banks are already doing this, and we appreciate the access to such services. Making banking information available in Spanish would encourage new accounts. Hiring bilingual staff is seen as positive marketing in our community.

Law Enforcement and the Legal System

How can police departments better serve the Hispanic community?

The presence of law enforcement officials at Hispanic community meetings means a lot to us. Local law enforcement is already working to assist the Hispanic community by offering such programs as car seat training and is truly appreciated. Another important service could be a Spanish hotline for people to report suspicion of crimes. Some people fear reporting crimes against them because of their status, others fear retaliation from the offender. Confirmation about confidentiality of hotline information and guarantees that it will not be used against undocumented informants would increase the likelihood of people reporting crime. The community could help recruit more Hispanics into law enforcement careers if bilingual brochures on opportunities and requirements are made available.

How we are different: The laws here and in our home countries are very different. We need to be educated about those differences. A good way to start would be to provide some education in Spanish about laws. We could work together to make a publication or to sponsor a series of classes in different locations in the region. We need to know the local laws and consequences of breaking them.

Housing

What type of housing needs does the local Hispanic population have?

Housing is always high on the list of priorities when surveying Hispanic community members. We like to live close to our families and are often found clustered in neighborhoods or homes with multiple extended family members. Access to public housing is prohibited for those without legal status. Poor housing conditions are sometimes not repaired for Hispanic tenants because of their foreign status. The Hispanic community lacks a housing advocacy organization to help locate adequate rental units. We also need help in securing loans to buy homes.

Religion

What percentage of the Spanish-speaking population that lives in Northeast Tennessee are Catholics? Does the larger Protestant population have an influence on Spanish-speaking populations in choosing to attend a church congregation that is not Catholic?

Internationally, 90 percent of Hispanics are considered Catholic. Local churches play a large role in the lives of Hispanic families and this community and its religion are increasingly diverse. Many of the churches in the region have been wonderful and do genuinely care for

our Hispanic people. Some non-Catholic/Protestant churches are reaching out to Hispanic families and gaining a growing Hispanic congregation. Hispanics see church-related customs as an important part of our culture. We are very grateful to the outreach and acceptance of local churches and appreciate continued sensitivity to every person's religious choice.



La Virgen de Guadalupe is an important aspect of Catholic Hispanic culture and is celebrated on December 12, at midnight with a mariachi band performing the song, Las Mañanitas.

Other Community Services

What are other community service needs of the Hispanic community?

- ▲ Bilingual staff at human services, health departments, public safety, driver's license bureau, social security office, and local employment offices would be very helpful.
- ▲ Access to public transportation is very important to the Hispanic community. Providing public bus schedules in Spanish would also help the community access transportation services.
- ▲ While the majority of the Hispanic population in Tennessee is young and working-age, there are a few elderly Hispanic residents. They typically have limited English-speaking skills and feel very isolated. They need medical attention and regional senior centers are encouraged to find bilingual staff or volunteers and offer transportation to elderly Hispanic clients.
- ▲ Other cities and regions have good programs that we should look into together. These include transition classroom school programs for children from foreign countries, Head Start programs based upon language criteria, and welcome packages in Spanish for new residents that include information about schools, services, and shopping.

Suggested first steps for partnerships... The Hispanic and Northeast Tennessee community

- ▲ Create a bilingual resource directory to identify local businesses and agencies that provide services and opportunities in both languages.
- ▲ Create a bilingual weekly or biweekly newsletter that lists business and job opportunities as well as local events in the community.
- ▲ Sponsor Latino informational fairs in different cities throughout the region with live music and food involving the agencies interested in the Hispanic Community.
- ▲ Share a continuing list of persons and organizations and agencies interested in communication with the Hispanic community.

**We are very enthusiastic about working together to increase the awareness and communication.
Thank you for your commitment to improve our community relations.**