



REFLECTIONS: Arturo Belkind, an architect/designer, and president of Salini Design in North Miami stands with his daughter, Nicole, who runs a marketing firm, as they look at a picture in the sales office for the Palazzo in Fort Lauderdale. The picture depicts one of the views future residents will have from windows of the building which Arturo Belkind designed. Photo/Josh Ritchie

Mexicans thrive in South Florida

Successful professionals say Cinco de Mayo helps promote homeland.

BY NICK SORTAL
STAFF WRITER

They're architects, bankers and public relations specialists: South Florida's Mexican population has become more professional.

Mexicans easily form the largest immigrant group in the United States, with most settling in California, Texas or Chicago. But in the past 13 years, the Mexican population in South Florida has almost tripled, from about 45,000 to more than 123,000, according to census figures.



OUR COMMUNITY'S MANY FACES



ADDED INGREDIENT: Mexican consul Jorge Lomónaco said South Florida "is like a rich Latin-American recipe, where the Mexican *chilito* has been missing. But now we're here to add our spice, and the Latin American — not a Mexican — dish is complete." Staff photo/Robert Duyos

And many are working professionals, says Jorge Lomónaco, the Mexican consul general in Miami. Among the reasons: other Hispanic cultures. "South Florida is like a rich Latin-American recipe, where the Mexican *chilito* has been missing," Lomónaco says. "But now we're here to add our spice, and the Latin American — not a Mexican — dish is complete."

Those interested in Mexican culture will celebrate Cinco de Mayo this week, either at festivals, restaurants or private gatherings. While the day is more of a commercial venture based in the United States than a celebration in Mexico, Lomónaco and others appreciate that their country gets noticed.

"It's a Mexican-American celebration, rather than a Mexican



FAITH: "From my own church, it used to be Mexican, Cuban and Puerto Rican. Now, it's like a United Nations," said Minnie García, 52, a youth minister from Delray Beach. Staff photo/Carline Jean

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COMMUNITY'S MANY FACES

LET'S PARTY

Cinco de Mayo celebrations
Where: Lake Forest Park, 3450 SW 48th Ave., Pembroke Park
When: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday
Cost: Free
Information: 954-985-1915

Where: Old School Square, 51 N. Swinton Ave., Delray Beach
When: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday
Cost: \$5; free for children younger than 10
Information: 561-276-3396

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one," he says. "It's a sign of acceptance."

Some of the new-arriving Mexicans are executives or own small companies, Lomónaco says. Others left Mexico in the late 1990s to bring their families to a safer environment.

Nicole Belkind Leon of Hollywood beat the big influx, arriving in 1982 when she was 7. Her father, Arturo Belkind, came as an architect but expanded his business into commercial space design. She is a partner with Belkind Schragger and Associates, a marketing and public relations firm specializing in real estate and upscale luxury products.

More professionals are moving to South Florida, but it takes some effort, notes Belkind Leon, 31.

"You see more Mexicans who have the income or capability to start a business coming here," she says. "You're not exactly crossing the border and just landing here."

Belkind, her father, has designed more than 400 sales centers — the buildings that are preludes to condominium projects — in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties in addition to projects internationally. Belkind, the founder of North Miami-based Salini Design, takes care to design the centers to reflect what the condos will look like in the coming years.

"The idea is to give them an idea of what they will be living in, because at the time, all that's there is air," he says.

MEXICO



Staff graphic/Renee Kwok

Population of Mexico (2004 estimate): 104.9 million

Population of residents of Mexican heritage in Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties (1990 census): 45,696

Population of residents of Mexican heritage in Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties (2000 census): 87,645

Population of residents of Mexican heritage in Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties (2003 estimate): 123,532

KEY OBSERVANCES IN MEXICO

May 1: Día del Trabajo. Labor Day in Mexico.

May 5: Cinco de Mayo. Holiday celebrates the defeat of invading French forces by Mexican troops on May 5, 1862.

Sept. 15-16: Independence Day celebrations mark Mexico's independence from Spain in 1810.

Nov. 20: Celebration of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, which abolished the country's dictatorship and created a representative form of government.

Dec. 12: Guadeloupe Day. Marks the day when the Virgin Mary is believed to have appeared on Tepeyac Hill in Mexico City in 1533.

Dec. 16-24: Las Posadas, which means lodging or shelter, and commemorates Mary's and Joseph's search for an inn. People walk from door to door in a neighborhood asking for lodging. They are turned away until they reach the home of the person who is throwing that night's Posadas party. The fiesta includes food, drinks and piñatas.

Throughout the year: Each city, town and village conducts a fiesta to honor its local patron saint.

SOURCES: South Florida residents of Mexican heritage, *The World Almanac*, U.S. census, the *World Book Encyclopedia*.

Roy Ramirez, 35, is among the Mexican young professionals in South Florida. He's an assistant vice president at a Wachovia Bank branch in Lake Worth. He says he's constantly asked if he's a teller.

"That's just something that's ingrained in people," Ramirez says.

The earlier wave of Mexicans became rooted in north and west Palm Beach County and south Miami-Dade County as field workers.

Minnie Garcia of Delray Beach was among those in the first migrant stream, when her parents brought her to West Palm Beach as an infant 52 years ago.

Garcia says the population numbers indicate a growth in Palm Beach County's Mexican population, but documenting the details is difficult.

"It's really hard to say because there is such a diverse Hispanic population in the area," she says. "You don't usually go around asking people what nationality they are."

Garcia is assistant to the rector and a youth minister at St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary in Boynton Beach, which has experienced change.

"From my own church, it used to be Mexican, Cuban and Puerto Rican," she says. "Now, it's like a United Nations."

Lomónaco estimates that there are about 500,000 Mexicans in Florida, most of them in rural areas. South Florida's economy hasn't recessed as much as Mexico's or even other heavily Mexican parts of the United States, he

notes, so this area has become a more popular place to settle.

"Overall, South Florida has become a Latin community, but it's very important for Mexicans to understand that they shouldn't treat South Florida as they would California or Texas," Lomónaco says. "In those places, they are by far the largest Hispanic community. It's important to every Mexican here to know that and integrate, rather than displace another community."

The Broward County Parks and Recreation Division, recognizing the mix of cultures, has planned a Cinco de Mayo celebration for Thursday at Lake Forest Park in Pembroke Park even though there is not an overwhelming Mexican population near the park, Lake Forest Park manager April LeClair says.

"We like to present different cultures to the community, and just have a lot of Hispanics here overall," she says.

In Delray Beach, the seventh annual Cinco de Mayo festival is set for Saturday, and also is designed to attract populations beyond only Mexicans.

Our Community's Many Faces periodically spotlights one of the dozens of nationalities conducting South Florida celebrations of cultural and historic milestones.

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