

The Latino Business Community in Somerville, Mass.



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Urban Borderlands, Fall 2003

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INTRODUCTION

The cool breeze tells us that summer is over. As we wait to cross Broadway, a busy avenue filled with cars and buses, the sun sets behind the brick buildings and large houses of Winter Hill. Broadway runs through the center of East Somerville, a diverse neighborhood not far from Charlestown and the center of Boston. All around us are stores and restaurants with signs in Spanish and Portuguese, and salsa music is blasting from a car radio. Most people driving through the neighborhood are on their way home from work in the city. People walking on the sidewalk are moving quickly, eager to get home before the warm day transforms into a cool autumn night. We, a small group of students from Tufts University and Somerville High School, are not going home yet. As soon as we see a break in the traffic, we run across the street and begin to walk up the sidewalk toward Tapatío, one of the most popular Salvadoran restaurants in the neighborhood. We pass by a small Latin American grocery store and a few other small shops before we enter Tapatío. The atmosphere is warm and cheerful, and most of the tables are filled with families eating a late-afternoon meal. We order two plates of *pupusas*, a Salvadoran specialty filled with pork or cheese, and sit down in the middle of the restaurant to wait for our late afternoon snack. East Somerville, just like many neighborhoods in Greater Boston, has its own personality. Although we are just minutes away from familiar places like Tufts University and Davis Square, East Somerville feels like it could be miles away. The food arrives and we dig in to the warm, fried *pupusas*. We are outside the Tufts "bubble" and part of a new community.

Escaping the "Tufts bubble" was just one of the goals in the creation of the class Urban Borderlands, an anthropology course at Tufts University. The main goal of the class is to research and get to know the Somerville's Latino community, one of the many immigrant communities in the diverse city. The course offered in the fall of 2003 was the third Urban Borderlands course offered by Professor Deborah Pacini-Hernandez, but for the first time, the class focused on the city of Somerville. The students in the class the previous two years had worked in Cambridge, a city with an older Latino community. In Cambridge, Puerto Ricans formed a large part of the Latino population, although the students in the course learned about the experiences of immigrants and families of immigrants from all over Latin America. The research, which was executed in the form of an oral history project, focused on a part of the

population whose story had seldom been told. This year, the class shifted its focus from Cambridge to Somerville, a city with a large but underrepresented Latino community. While the older Latino communities in Boston are largely Puerto Rican and Dominican, Somerville's Latino community is younger, and is largely Central American. Little had been written about Somerville's Latino community in the past, and the move to Somerville meant exploring new territory and talking to people who, for the most part, had never participated in such a project before. Although the project taken on by Urban Borderlands in Somerville is hardly over, it is an important first step in writing and documenting the history of an important community in the city.

This semester's Urban Borderlands class was made up of 7 students working under the guidance of Professor Deborah Pacini-Hernandez and Rosaura Vega, a graduate school student who acted as the course's teaching assistant. Some students paired up to work on specific projects, while others worked individually on their themes. The topics covered this semester included Latino owned businesses, family structure/gender issues, bilingual education and the role of bilingualism, the role of soccer in the Latino community, and the ways Latinos in Somerville give back to the community. The overall purpose of the course was to find out more about the Latino community in Somerville by means of one on one interviews. Also, students had to go into the community, meet people and learn about the Latinos in Somerville first-hand. Throughout the semester, the core class of 7 students and 2 teachers teamed up with various groups and individuals to complete a project that, in the end, was a collaborative effort.

Before the year began, Somerville Public Library contacted Professor Pacini-Hernandez about a grant they had received to conduct a similar project with the Latino Community. Dora St. Martin, a librarian at Somerville Public Library and Ceci Sosa, a Latina community leader from Somerville, wanted to create an exhibit at the library that focused on the Latino community. There had been almost no press about the Latino community other than a series of articles and letters about gang-related activities in the Salvadoran community. Dora and Ceci wanted to counteract this negative press with a positive exhibit about the community. Since the themes of their project overlapped with Urban Borderlands, our class was able to work with them.

A more important community connected was formed with the Welcome Project at the Mystic View Housing Project in Somerville. The Welcome Project serves Mystic View residents from all backgrounds, including many Latinos. Nelson Salazar, who runs the Welcome Project,

was an amazing resource throughout the entire project. Urban Borderlands teamed up with high school students (mostly from Somerville High School) who chose to get involved with the Welcome Project. Most of the students live in Mystic View, and most are Latinos (the majority are Salvadoran). Nelson, who is also Salvadoran, helped arrange student partners for each group. Working with Latino high school students gave us access to the community in a different way: the students know people in the Latino community, most speak Spanish fluently, and were eager to learn about their own community in their own city. Without the help of these students, the project would not have been as successful.

The goals of the class were to research specific topics by means of interviews and also learn about the Latino community in Somerville and Greater Boston. The course was structured so that many class meetings were held in the community. We visited organizations such as Centro Presente and Concilio Hispano, often with Nelson and the high school students, and also met at the Welcome Project. Outside of class, students and their high school partners worked together in various parts of Somerville conducting interviews and getting to know the community. All the students in the class dedicated significant amounts of time to their project, though the biggest problem that we, as a group, faced was time constraints. There is a lot to find out about any community, and exploring one that has not been fully researched before is an endless task. Hopefully, our reports will be a useful tool for future research and study of Somerville's Latino community, and can be useful historical documents for the City of Somerville.

THE LATINO BUSINESS COMMUNITY IN SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

This report focuses on our project and interviews on the Latino business community in Somerville. We, Emily Chasan and David Pistrang, worked with high school students Bianca Salazar and Evelin Santos throughout the course of the semester to explore Somerville's Latino-owned businesses all over the city. After exploring a bit of Somerville during the first two weeks of classes, it was clear to everyone in the class that the topic of Latino-owned businesses in Somerville should be included in the Urban Borderlands Fall 2003 project. Somerville boasts a wide variety of Latino-owned businesses, but very little work had been done to keep track of businesses, let alone study them in depth. One primary goal of our project was to make a directory of Latino-owned businesses in Somerville. The one clue we had came from a report on minority owned businesses from the 1997 U.S. Economic Census, which listed about 175 "Hispanic owned" businesses in Somerville. After some exploring, we concluded that this figure included not only Spanish speaking Latinos, but also the Brazilian and possibly Haitian businesses. The Brazilian community in Somerville is larger than the Latino community, and worthy of a whole other project; we estimated that more than half of the businesses on the list were Brazilian.

Other than creating a list of Latino-owned businesses, we hoped to find out what it is like to be a Latino business owner in Somerville. After identifying different businesses, we tried to set up interviews with a diverse group of business owners. We considered various questions in our interviews: Who are the clients of the businesses? Do businesses cater exclusively to the Latino community? What are the differences between owning a business on Broadway versus owning a business in a less commercial or less Latino area? How does ethnicity of the owner affect clientele? How are relations between businesses, and what type of organization exists? How are relationships with the city government? How do Latino-owned businesses fit in with the city of Somerville and the business community as a whole?

Our questions and diverse group of interviewees led us to some common themes, but also showed us that there is no "typical" Latino-business owner in Somerville. While many share the same obstacles, each person we talked to had a different story to tell. In the following report, we first will present a short history of the Latino business community in Somerville, followed by an overview of the types of businesses in Somerville today. Next we will explore some of the

themes that appeared in multiple interviews, and conclusions we made about the business environment. In the second section of the report, we will take a detailed look at the businesses whose owners we interviewed and provide overviews of different types of businesses.

OUR PROJECT

Throughout the course of the semester, we made numerous trips with our high school partners to various parts of Somerville. Oftentimes, these trips involved driving through Somerville looking for Latino-owned businesses. By the end of the semester, we were familiar with almost every neighborhood in Somerville. To find possible interviewees, we entered every Latino-owned business we could find and asked to speak to the owner. Sometimes we would go into non-Latino owned businesses by mistake and we probably also missed a few Latino-owned businesses. However, by entering every store and business, we were able to find many interviewees, and also get a sense of the variety of businesses that exist in Somerville. Persistence was important in arranging interviews. We found that walking into a business multiple times to speak directly with the owner often worked better than arranging interviews by phone. The more time we spent in Somerville, the more we got to know the business owners and the community.

Spending time in Somerville, especially the commercial area of East Somerville, gave us a sense of the types of businesses that exist and the types of people that go to the different businesses. We had multiple opportunities to just "hang out" in Somerville and observe, which helped us form ideas about the Latino business community. However, if we had had more time to spend in Somerville, we would have been able to find out more about the community.

LIST OF NARRATORS

ANA BRAN

Ana came to Somerville from Ilopango, El Salvador in 1986. In El Salvador she worked in a bread factory, and she continues to bake bread in Somerville on an informal basis. She lives with her daughter, son-in-law, and family. Ana was able to comment on the consumer perspective and history of the community.

MILAGRO GARCÍA

Milagro came to the U.S. from El Salvador in 1988. She opened her store Milagro's Boutique on Broadway ten years later. Milagro has also worked at a bakery and lived in Los Angeles. In her five years as a business owner her store has become one of the most popular and most frequented in Somerville. She lives in Somerville with her youngest daughter.

ESTHER FLORES

Esther Flores was born in Lima, Peru, and came to the United States when she was 19 years old. She studied tourism and hotel management at the university both in Peru and in the United States. Esther worked in travel agencies in Jamaica Plain and East Boston before opening her own business, Peru Travel, in 2000. She is trilingual, speaking Spanish, English and Portuguese, and commented that this is important for her business. Esther lives in Revere with her two daughters.

NORA ESTELA GARNICA

Nora Estela Garnica was born in Guatemala in 1960 and came to the U.S. in 1981. She married her husband Eduardo Garnica in 1982, and the two of them worked a variety of jobs throughout the 1980's. In 1989, she and her husband decided to open a Latin American grocery store in Union Square. La Internacional, then called E&N Tropical Market, was one of the first Latin American markets in Somerville. La Internacional is popular with both the Latino population and the Haitian population, and Nora told us that the majority of her clients are Haitian. Nora lives with her family near Union Square, Somerville.

JENNY GOMEZ

Jenny Gomez was born in Lima, Peru in 1975 and came to the United States when she was 17 years old. Jenny studied English in the United States, and then married at the age of 19. After years of experience working at Boca Grande, a Mexican *taqueria* in Cambridge, Jenny decided to open her own restaurant this year. My Mexicano opened in September, and Jenny was able to comment on the experience of opening a business in Somerville. My Mexicano is located on Highland Av. in the center of Somerville, and since not many Latinos live in this area, the

restaurant mostly caters to non-Latinos. In the past few weeks, Jenny has started incorporating some Peruvian specialties into her menu.

MARÍA GRASSO

María “Maryom” Grasso is the owner of Maryom Hair Design on Main Street. She came to the U.S. from Venezuela from Venezuela in 1992 at the age of 21 by herself. Her sister had been living in the US for about eight to ten years before she came to join her. She has one son. She studied English, and eventually went to work as a hairdresser in Cambridge. She had been a hairdresser in Venezuela as well. Maryom decided to open her own business in 1996. She says she did so, mostly because she always wanted to open her own shop and work closer to her home. Maryom gave a lot of insight into relations between local government and the business community.

AMILCAR LOPEZ

Amilcar Lopez immigrated to the U.S. from Guatemala with his family at the age of 15 in 1975. He graduated from Brighton High School, and the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. He is the owner of Lopesa Services, which is arguably, one of the most successful businesses in East Somerville. Lopesa Services provides accounting services to at least 4,000 people per year. Amilcar and his family live in Andover, Massachusetts. He has three children

YONY ORANTES

Yony Orantes came to the U.S. from El Salvador in June of 2001. He is the owner of Bazar El Salvador on Broadway. The store had a different owner for seven years before he bought it from her. He had previously owned his own supermarket in El Salvador. He is a cousin of Milagro García. He lives in East Boston with his wife and daughter and commutes to Somerville.

LUIS SERRANO

Luis Serrano was born in El Salvador in 1977. In 1997, he came to the United States. Luis first spent time in Atlanta, but came to Boston to visit about one year ago. Although he planned to go back to Atlanta, he was given the opportunity to take over the 99 Plus Store in East Somerville. The 99 Plus Store sells a variety of religious items, as well as miscellaneous items. Luis is

religious, and is happy to sell music and books that might help people. Since Luis does not speak much English, owning a store in the United States has been a challenge.

LEO ZUÑIGA

Leo Zuñiga was born in Puebla, Mexico in 1962. He moved to California at the age of 21, and he lived in California for 15 years. Leo met his wife, who is Salvadoran, in Los Angeles, and four years ago, they moved with their now 11-year-old daughter to Massachusetts. Leo and his wife opened Tacos Lupita with his wife's sister and brother-in-law, but one year ago, Leo and his wife took over the ownership and management of the entire restaurant. Tacos Lupita serves both Mexican and Salvadoran specialties, and is popular with both Latinos and non-Latinos. Tacos Lupita is about to celebrate its fourth anniversary, and after four years in Somerville, has a large following.

COMMUNITY HISTORY

Surrounded by Boston, Cambridge, Medford and Arlington, Somerville is the largest city in Massachusetts' Middlesex County. Somerville is also located on the Mystic River. Latinos began to immigrate directly to Somerville in the 1980s. Whether it was for economic opportunities, diplomatic missions, family ties, civil wars, dictatorships, or military coups in their home countries, Somerville, East Boston, and Cambridge became a popular location for new Latino immigrants to settle.

According to the U.S. Census, Somerville is home to 77,478 residents. The census said there were 6,786 Latinos living in Somerville in 2001. That number, however is believed to be missing somewhere between 2,000 and 4,000 undocumented immigrants. In Somerville, the Latino population appears to be mostly composed of Salvadorans, but there are also Guatemalan, Honduran, Nicaraguan, Panamanian, and Costa Rican communities present.¹

In understanding the Latino population in Somerville, it is important to realize that they are a part of a much larger immigrant community in Somerville. This section will talk about Somerville's immigration history, and finish with more on the Latino community.

Such a large Latino population, has only arrived in Somerville in recent years. In fact, according to Former Tufts University Provost Sol Gittleman², who has been living and working locally for the last 23 years, Somerville had previously seemed like the least likely place to attract immigrant groups. In 1834 there was a convent burning, and Somerville was known for its bitter conflicts between the city's catholic and protestant residents. Former Somerville Mayor, Eugene Brune,³ says the community was predominantly Irish, Italian, French Canadian and Greek and in the 1980s Somerville's immigration pattern changed quickly. This all began to change however, in the last 40 years. According to Gittleman, the first distinct ethnic group in Somerville was the Cape Verdeans who arrived in Somerville throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Gittleman said there was a Medford Casket Company that was looking for labor at the time and hired Portuguese-speaking immigrants from Cape Verde.

This continued to attract the Portuguese speaking community to Somerville.

¹ Dora St. Martin. MHRAB Documentary Heritage Grant Proposal/Latino Archives Project. Somerville Library.2002.

² Phone interview by Emily Chasan with Sol Gittleman, December 9, 2003.

³ Phone interview by Emily Chasan with Eugene Brune, December 10, 2003

During the Vietnam War, Gittleman said that people began to immigrate from Cambodia, Vietnam and a few other countries. He said Dominicans, Haitians, Salvadorans and other Latin Americans began to arrive in Somerville from the 1970s through the 1990s. Today, Gittleman says that election ballots are in as many as seven or eight languages in Somerville, including Asian and Southeast Asian languages.

Brune believes that immigrants chose to come to Somerville for a combination of three reasons. He described Somerville as a “friendly city” where the housing stock was reasonable to either purchase or rent during that time. Thirdly, he said the school system had a decent to good track record, and that was another attraction. He also mentioned services for the elderly, and though park space was limited he said at the time the City was offering a good mix of recreational activities for children. “Kids may not have a lot of play area, but there were a lot of programs for them,” he said. He said that Somerville may have provided “the best buy for the buck.” It had the benefit of being close to Boston and a lot of Universities and it was appearing to attract a more and more diverse base of people. “You couldn’t help but begin moving to Somerville in the 80s,” Brune said.

At this point Somerville seems to have become relatively hospitable for immigrant communities, as recalled by Brune. Compared to other nearby towns like Lowell and Lawrence Somerville had a huge mix of ethnic groups and relatively minor problems.

He said the town is about four square miles, and in that small space 70,000 people lived together in the 1980s “We’re probably the most densely populated city in the state,” he said. “And all kinds of people, from all kinds of ethnic backgrounds, race, creed and religion, live here and we all seem to get along.” Brune said Somerville is not without its share of problems, but that the problems between Somerville’s citizens are minor in comparison to other nearby communities with similar populations, a lot more square miles, and a lot less people.

“The people of Somerville all seem to get along, and help each other. Its a very caring city,” he continued. Today, Brune believes Somerville is still predominantly Irish and Italian, but the third largest group is probably Portuguese. To those groups he added the Salvadoran, Brazilian, Asian, and Haitian populations as prominent ethnic groups within the City.

Brune said he mostly worked with the Haitian and Portuguese communities while he was in office, and that the Salvadoran community began to come, more toward the end of his term.

The Salvadoran community began to heavily come to Somerville in the late 1980s. Between the years of 1980 and 1992, hundreds of Salvadoran exiles and refugees fled the country to escape a bloody civil war. Salvadoran immigrants tried to apply for political asylum in the US, Canada and Europe, though few were successful. Due to the large numbers of undocumented immigrants in 1987 Somerville, along with nearby Brookline and Cambridge, became a Sanctuary city. Paralleled to the underground railroad, the Sanctuary movement allowed refugees to live and work in the City, without being asked for documents by city employees for any purpose. In essence, Salvadorans were afforded the same rights and privileges as documented citizens⁴. The Salvadoran community in Somerville became established then, and Salvadorans continued to enter Somerville by either moving into the town from other nearby locations, or others fled from the 1994 earthquake.

THE LATINO BUSINESS COMMUNITY GROWS

Before the 1980s, East Somerville was a mixture of Irish and Italian groups. Brune described the business district as an area full of Mom and Pop stores. Tony's Foodland is still a part of the Broadway landscape today, and was at least since the 1970s. He said the store is owned by a man named Tony Pino. He said Dapper Dan's Restaurant was a thriving location and that Harry's Hardware on Broadway was practically an East Somerville institution. Harry's Hardware had been in East Somerville for over 50 years, but Brune said it went out of business in the late 80s.

That was the point when the first Latino Businesses began to crop up in East Somerville. According to Ana Bran, the first Latino business was Los Amigos Market on Broadway. Owned by Tony Morales, the store specializes in Salvadoran foods and a selection of other Latino foods, tropical fruits and vegetables, and other items like phone cards. Businesses often bridge life between two countries, providing goods and services, similar to what was available in South and Central America. Ana Bran said she remembers the store opening in the late 1980s.

Some business owners we spoke to said that there was not very much improvement in the East Somerville business areas since they have been there. One owner said the streets felt ugly

⁴ Dora St. Martin. Op cit.

and needed better landscaping. With rising rent prices, business owners are not seeing any changes in the community.

According to Brune, there were plans for the East Somerville area, and business areas in the 1980s when he was mayor. Brune was mayor for the entire decade.

Brune said what happened in Somerville in the 1980s was also very heavily influenced by the city's poor economic situation due to the slipping economy. He said the late 1980s, particularly 1988 and 1989 were very bad years for the City when real estate prices really plummeted. He said property could be bought very cheaply at the time and small stores were going out of business. To only worsen the matter, in the beginning of the 1980s, when Brune first entered office, he was greeted with Proposition 2.5 from the State, where he was required to lower taxes by 15 percent for three years in a row. He said there were many projects in the works that were unable to be completed do to financial problems in the city. For example, Brune spoke of a development plan to build a hotel and four office buildings around the Assembly Square area. However, the developer went bankrupt before they could break ground on the project. "That would have been the start of that whole area," he said.

Though the population has changed significantly, with stores like Vinny's and Super Vet still present, Brune said the area still looks much the same. During the 80s the Brune administration was responsible for creating the "Welcome to East Somerville" signs and to add more trees in the Lower Broadway area. He also tried to improve the library branch in the East Somerville area and put up lights around the holidays. "I never felt I did enough," he said. "There was a lot more I wanted to do."

Latino businesses have since moved into Somerville in everywhere from Union Square to mid-Broadway. Most of the Latino population in Somerville is concentrated in East Somerville, so most of the businesses are also there. The growth in businesses reflects the growth of the community.

The U.S. government completes an economic census every five years, and data collection for the newest Census began in September 2003. New data on Latino Somerville businesses was not available, but we suspect the number of businesses has increased since the 1997 report. In Somerville, the census revealed that in 1997 there were 175 Hispanic owned businesses⁵ in

⁵ As defined by the U.S. Economic Census, "Hispanic-owned businesses" are those where the sole proprietor identified his or her origin as Cuban, "Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano," Puerto Rican, Spaniard, Hispanic Latin

Somerville, 43 of which had paid employees. These businesses had sales and receipts totaling \$25,518,000 with those 43 businesses with paid employees accounting for almost all but \$1,000,000 in sales and receipts.

FUTURE

Over the years Latino businesses in Somerville have faced numerous successes and challenges. One of the primary challenges is the parking situation in East Somerville. Many business owners were frustrated with street parking regulations that only allow a car to be parked for a one or two hour time limit. They believe customers sometimes don't patron their stores because they are afraid of tickets.

Furthermore, in Somerville, almost all city services are only in English⁶. This can present a challenge, but most of the business owners we spoke to have completed English for Speakers of Other Languages courses.

Another recent challenge has been the rising of rents in Somerville. Very recently, Somerville has experienced an increased popularity, and rental prices have soared. This is due to the town's proximity to Boston, public transportation and the increasing popularity of Davis Square. Many families have been forced to move elsewhere.⁷

As rents continue to rise in the city, the future of the Latino community in this city is likely to change. As opposed to nearby Latino communities like East Boston and Cambridge, Somerville does not have a historical Latino base, or an older generation of Latinos that have lived in the area for a long time.

Whether the community's income levels can rise at a rate comparable to housing prices will be a contentious issue in the future. Boston's subway, "The T" is slated to expand to more parts of Somerville in the next eight to ten years. As rents in Somerville have almost doubled in

American, or Other Spanish/Hispanic/Latino on the 1997 or 1992 survey questionnaire; or, in the case of firms with multiple owners, where 51 percent or more of stock interest, claims or rights were held by Hispanics so determined. Hispanic origin and race were determined in separate questions, and some Hispanic-owned businesses were also counted in race categories included in this report.

⁶ MacDonald, <http://www2.wgbh.org/mbcweis/lrc/fnma2/hispanics.html>

⁷ Dora St. Martin. Op. Cit.

recent years due to the growing popularity of areas like Davis Square, this expansion may cause housing and other property rents to increase further.

In addition, The City of Somerville has been relatively ineffective in reaching out to Latinos. Most of the Latino business owners we spoke with bore some sort of resentment to the local government, whether it was an issue of money or parking, they did not seem to feel that the city was particularly willing to help them.

There is evidence that this may be changing. Though we were unable to connect with Tony Morales, who owns three stores on Broadway in East Somerville, we have heard that he is active in trying to organize the Latino Business Community. Morales was also actively involved in the management of the campaign for Somerville's recently elected mayor, Joe Curtatone. In addition, the Somerville Community Development Corporation has been working on an East Somerville Organizing Initiative, to bring together the community in a more effective manner. Their flyers state that the goal of the organizing initiative is to dissolve barriers.

Somerville is often known as a transient community. It remains to be seen whether Latino voters will become a more powerful political force in Somerville and stay, or whether the rising rental prices will drive the community to move elsewhere.

After completing this project we sincerely hope that the latter will not be the case. As reflected through its vibrant Latino business community.

OVERVIEW OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The Latino business community in Somerville is spread throughout the entire city, though there are certain areas that have a significantly greater number of Latino-owned businesses. Somerville, like most cities in the Metro-Boston area, is made up of smaller neighborhoods, often centered around "squares." Thus, when people refer to "Union Square," they are talking about the neighborhood and businesses that surround the square. The name of the square becomes the neighborhood. Of course, this is not always true. Other neighborhoods in Somerville include Winter Hill, Spring Hill and East Somerville. Most (but not all) Latino-owned businesses in Somerville are in the eastern section of Somerville, in Union Square, East Somerville and Winter Hill. East Somerville in particular is a largely Latino neighborhood, and the portion of Broadway that runs through East Somerville is lined with many Latino-owned businesses. However, there are some Latino owned businesses, particularly restaurants and supermarkets, in other parts of the city. Tacos Lupita, for example, is in a non-commercial section of Somerville, though it is close to Porter Square (part of Cambridge). Mi Mexicano, a new Mexican restaurant that caters more to white Americans than to Latinos, is in the center of Somerville near the hospital. While Latino owned businesses are everywhere, the neighborhood often determines the clientele.

The most common Latino businesses are those that cater to the Latino community. The possible exceptions to this rule are some restaurants and some services that are convenient for anyone who does business in the area. Supermarkets that sell Latin American groceries are very common, as are restaurants like Tapatío that serve Latin American food. Many Latinos still want to eat foods that were common in their home country, and since cuisines in most of Central America and the Caribbean have a lot in common, these supermarkets can cater to everyone. Many stores offer clothing, gifts or special items from Latin America. For example, one store focuses on presents for *quinciniera* parties, while another store sells religious music from Latin America. Other stores sell popular music and videos from Latin America and get most of their business from Latin American immigrants.

Other businesses offer services that are of particular interest to Latinos, though could potentially be of interest to anyone. Peru Travel, a travel agency in East Somerville, focuses on trips to South and Central America. They also offer money transfer service. This is in high

demand in the Latino community, as many Latinos in the United States send money to relatives in Latin America. However, anyone can enter Peru Travel and send money to any destination in the world. The same can be said for most other services; although Latino owned service businesses mostly cater to the Latino community, there is nothing stopping anyone else from doing business there. Finally, there is an informal economy in Somerville of men and women who make food or crafts to sell to other people in the community. These "businesses" are catered to people within the community, and usually to people who know each other through church, sports or family friends/relatives.

There are all types of Latino-owned businesses that are able to compete simply because they offer a "safe" place for Spanish speakers. For recent (or not so recent) immigrants who don't speak much English, shopping or doing business with people who don't speak Spanish can be difficult. Leo Zuñiga, owner of Tacos Lupita, used to live in a part of Los Angeles that he described as "just like Mexico." In Los Angeles, Leo was able to get by without ever speaking English. Here in Boston, however, he finds that he has to use English more often. Still, people like to go where they feel comfortable, and businesses with owners and employees who speak Spanish attract Latino customers. Ana Bran told us that women she knew never went to Market Basket, a large supermarket chain, since they were unsure about their English. They paid higher prices for most foods at stores like La Internacional, a small Latin American supermarket near Union Square. All types of business have a niche if they attract Spanish speaking customers, and therefore, Latino-owned businesses range from car repair companies to accounting services, and from travel agencies to restaurants.

THEMES

In this section, we will explore a number of common themes we discovered after our interviews with Latino business owners in Somerville. Some of these themes may be common in Latino owned businesses all over the country, while others may not even hold true in other Boston neighborhoods like East Boston or Jamaica Plain. However, despite differences between all business owners, some themes are worth special mention.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE SOMERVILLE GOVERNMENT

In every interview, we asked business owners about their experiences with the government of Somerville. Every business owner we talked to described their experience of opening/starting the business and the brief contact with the government, but then told us that since then, there had been little contact with the city government. From what we can tell, the Somerville city government is doing very little to reach out to the Latino business community, and it appears that it is doing very little to reach out to any small business owners.

Most of our interviewees had few problems with the Somerville government when starting their business. Everyone confirmed that when they started out, they talked to no one who spoke Spanish. This meant that knowledge of English was important for starting a business. No business owner told us that he/she was treated differently because of being Latino, and most told us that the process was not too difficult. However, all agreed that once the process of opening the business was over, the city offered no more support.

Some of the business owners we interviewed were disappointed with the government. Esther Flores, who has also worked in East Boston, told us that the East Boston government had much more contact with business owners. Meanwhile, she sees no organization here. Others had small complaints about Somerville. Nora Garnica, owner of La Internacional, complained about parking restrictions on streets and was particularly upset with the city for not designating an unloading zone in front of her store. Maryom, from Maryom Hair Design, agreed that the city could do more to improve the business environment. Although most of the business owners we interviewed did not talk about politics, one can hope that Joe Curtatone, the newly elected mayor

of Somerville will run a government that makes more of an effort to support businesses, including Latino owned businesses.

RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

As mentioned earlier, Somerville is a diverse city with large immigrant communities from all over the world. While some immigrant groups do not have much in common, we found that many Latino business owners found relationships and business with the Brazilian and Haitian communities as important. Massachusetts is home to the second largest Brazilian population in the United States, about 150,000 people. Somerville's population is one of the largest in Massachusetts.⁸ The Brazilian community is larger than the Spanish speaking Latino community, and many Brazilian businesses are right next to Latino businesses. While most business owners did not express any strong sense of community among any business owners, most also told us that they saw little difference or division between the Brazilian and Latino communities. Esther Flores of Peru Travel told us that she has been invited to events and meetings of her Brazilian grocery store neighbors, and that many people who come to her travel agency are Brazilians who want to plan trips to Brazil. Esther has picked up Portuguese over the past four years she has worked in East Somerville, and she commented that if she were to someday expand her business, she would want to hire a Portuguese speaking employee to try to cater more to the Brazilian community.

In general, since Portuguese and Spanish are very similar, Brazilians and Latinos can understand each other. When Luis Serrano, the owner of 99 Plus Store on Broadway, called a restaurant to order a sub, he asked to speak to someone who spoke Spanish. Instead, he was given a person who speaks Portuguese. Most Latino storeowners pick up a few words of Portuguese to aid in communication. The similarity of the languages and the fact that many Brazilian and Latino businesses are side by side lead to a mixing of the two business communities. Over time, we suspect that the capability of catering to English, Spanish *and* Portuguese speakers will become more desirable.

⁸ Martes, Ana Cristina Braga. "Brazilians in the United States: A Study of Immigrants in Massachusetts."

The Haitian community, though smaller than the Brazilian and Latino communities, came up in our interview with Nora Garnica. Nora told us that when she first opened La Internacional in Union Square, most of her clients were Haitian. Nora said that her store carried many Central American products that are also popular in Haiti, and that Haitians felt comfortable in her store. Nora commented that many Haitians might have faced discrimination in other locations. Today, Nora estimates that more than 50% of the clients at La Internacional are Haitians, even though products are mostly Latin American and the employees all speak Spanish (and don't speak Creole). Common diets and common neighborhoods lead to crossovers among the immigrant communities in Somerville.

BACKGROUNDS OF BUSINESS OWNERS

While many of our peers in Urban Borderlands interviewed Somerville residents who may have lived poorer lives in Latin America and/or had difficult journeys to the United States, most business owners had some "in" into the business community. This "in" usually came in the form of money. Most of the business owners we talked to came to the United States with a visa, which means that their families were able to afford to send them or bring them to the United States. The two Peruvian women we interviewed were both educated in Peru before coming to the United States, and once here, both studied English. Most of the business owners told us that they came to the United States for better opportunities for their families. However, it is probable that most came from relatively stable financial situations in Latin America.

The role of family ties, an important theme in many of the Urban Borderlands projects, also plays an important role in the business community. Having family in the area makes starting and running a business much easier. Esther Flores and her brother would not have been able to work in tourism if it hadn't been for Esther's mother, who came to the United States before them. Esther's mother provided money that was necessary to get the business going. Milagro Garcia, owner of Milagro's Boutique, helped her cousin Yony Orantes buy Bazar El Salvador before he moved to the United States. Other business owners depend on family members to help run the business. Many restaurants are family run, or at least have related employees. Leo Zuñiga works with his wife at Tacos Lupita, while Nora Garnica works with her husband at La Internacional. Close family ties are more common in Latin America than in the

United States, and some of our interviewees commented that one of the hardest things about coming to the United States was leaving family behind. Nora Garnica noted that she was eager to get married simply because she had no other family in the United States. Leo Zuñiga and his family came to Somerville to open Tacos Lupita with his wife's sister and her husband. If it weren't for family in Boston, the Zuñiga family would still live in Los Angeles.

Families, even extended families or close family friends, make the adjustment to living in the United States easier. Some restaurants that are managed and run by a non-U.S. citizen might be owned by a family member who is a citizen. Families and friends welcome those who have just arrived, and often host recent immigrants until they get settled. Finally, many international family ties still exist, despite the distance. Many people from El Salvador keep up to date on all the news and gossip from their hometowns even though they now live thousands of miles away. Families and people live transnational lives.

In addition to being linked to Latin America, Somerville also has strong links to Latino communities in other parts of Boston. Jamaica Plain was one of the first large Latino neighborhoods in Metro-Boston, and still has a large Latino (especially Caribbean) community. East Boston and Chelsea are also communities with many Latinos and Latino businesses. Most of the people we interviewed did not come straight to Somerville when they arrived in Boston, rather lived first in East Boston, Hyde Park or another Boston neighborhood. Many business owners have links to or have worked in these other neighborhoods as well. Today, many Latinos are moving out of the city into suburbs like Malden, Revere and Lynn, where the communities are also growing. Leo Zuñiga lives in Methuen, Esther Flores lives in Revere, and Luis Serrano lives in East Boston. The Latino community in Somerville is actually part of a larger Latino community that covers much of Boston.

CLIENTELE AND BUSINESSES' RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE COMMUNITY

Most of the Latino business owners that we talked to said that Somerville has a Latino community, and that they feel that they (and their business) are part of that community. Although the Latino community is large, ties between family and friends often make it seem like everyone knows everyone else. Leo Zuñiga, who is Mexican, came to Somerville just four years ago with his Salvadoran wife to open Tacos Lupita. When we asked him if he knew many other Latino

business owners in Somerville, he initially replied that he didn't know very many. Then he told us that in fact he *did* know people, just not very well. He proceeded to list off over half of the business owners that we had talked to. The Latino business community is not very large.

Most of the business owners we talked to told us that they have many repeat clients. In other words, many of their customers are regulars, and in some cases, have been customers for years. Some older businesses reported that customers often travel from places outside of Somerville, such as Everett, Malden or Medford. Somerville offers services that may not be offered in other towns. One could generalize that Latin American culture encourages more communication between customers and employees of businesses. In other words, people take the time to talk to each other and say hi before getting down to business. This leads to a community that is closely linked. Our high school students, especially Evelin Santos, knew business owners and employees all over the city. The Latino community is almost like a small town within a city, where people often know each other, or if not, are only a few degrees of separation apart.

Since the community is small, many businesses told us the ways that they give back to the community. Restaurants, such as Tacos Lupita, sponsor events in the Latino community by donating food. Such events might happen in churches, or perhaps in the form of festivals. Unfortunately, there is not much organization of the Latino business community. It seems like most business owners would like to participate more in "giving back" to the community, though many do not know how.

THEMES CONCLUSION

The themes that we have mentioned in this section are just generalizations based on the various stories and opinions of the business owners we interviewed. In the following section, where we will take a closer look at the businesses and business owners that we interviewed, we will refer back to the topics mentioned in this section.

TYPES OF BUSINESSES

We divided our businesses into five categories: restaurant, stores, supermarkets, services and the informal economy. In this section, we will give an overview of each type of business. Next, we will include information about the businesses and business owners that we interviewed this semester. Each detailed section will include a personal background of the business owner, a history of the business, and the business owner's comments about their experiences owning a business in Somerville. We will relate each section back to the themes discussed earlier in this report.

RESTAURANTS – AN OVERVIEW

Latino-owned restaurants form an important part of the Latino business community. In Somerville, there are about a dozen Latino owned restaurants, all specializing in some type of Latin American food. In general, a Salvadoran restaurant attracts mostly Salvadoran customers, while a Guatemalan restaurant attracts more Guatemalans. However, there is a significant amount of overlap in both clients and types of food that are served. In fact, many restaurants offer both Mexican food and Central American food, even if the owners are not Mexican. Many of Somerville's Latino-owned restaurants are in East Somerville, though others can be found in all parts of Somerville. Once again, the clientele often varies based on the location of the restaurant. Once a restaurant gains popularity, however, it is not uncommon for people to make a trek to find food that they like.

Over the course of the semester, we visited almost every (if not every) Latino-owned restaurant in the city of Somerville. In the fall of 2003, there were Mexican restaurants, a Peruvian restaurant, a Dominican restaurant and Central American restaurants. Most Central American restaurants offered typical Mexican foods that are popular in the United States (such as burritos and tacos) as well as Central American specialties. Most restaurants offer authentic choices that are clearly aimed at people from that country. For example, Los Paisanos, a Guatemalan restaurant on Broadway, offers Guatemalan style breakfasts, but also offers more familiar burritos and quesadillas.

Since we all enjoy Latin American food, we made it our goal to try at least a juice or drink from every restaurant we found. Our favorite place for *batidos de fruta* was Las Palmeras, a Dominican restaurant that only survived 3 months. Every time we went to Las Palmeras, we were the only customers in the small "order at the counter" establishment. Tapatío, a popular Salvadoran restaurant across the street, seemed to always have customers, no matter what time it was. We noticed that the south side of Broadway was, in general, more full of pedestrians and lined with more businesses. Las Palmeras had the curse of being Dominican (in a neighborhood that is mostly Central American and Brazilian) and having a location on the "wrong side" of the street. We watched as the restaurant struggled to survive, and then closed suddenly after 3 months. In the end, we never had an interview with anyone from Las Palmeras.

The two interviews and restaurants in this section have things in common, but are also very different in many ways. While My Mexicano is a very new restaurant, Tacos Lupita is about to celebrate its fourth birthday. Although neither restaurant is in East Somerville, the biggest Latino commercial area, Tacos Lupita has a greater following simply because it is an older restaurant. Both owners provided a lot of information in their interviews, so we were able to find out a lot about the experience of owning a restaurant in Somerville.

JENNY GOMEZ

MY MEXICANO



Jenny Gomez (right) with her sister in My Mexicano

My Mexicano is a new restaurant on Highland Avenue, near the hospital in Central Somerville. When Jenny Gomez decided to do the interview, we were pleased to have the opportunity to talk to someone who had just opened a business. Since everything was fresh in her mind, Jenny was able to tell us about the process of opening a restaurant in Somerville. The interview went well, and Jenny talked a lot about her personal experiences, frustrations and victories. Since My Mexicano is not in a large commercial area (or an area with lots of Latinos), her experience is different from Latino restaurant owners in other parts of Somerville.

I (David) conducted this interview in Spanish. Jenny speaks English quite well, but she chose to do the interview in Spanish. The interview took place in the morning on Monday, October 27, in the restaurant. The interview lasted about 1 hour, and Jenny was very willing to talk to me. The interview with Jenny was my fifth interview with Latino business owners, and Jenny was the second young (under 30) owner that I interviewed.

Jenny Gomez was born in Lima, Peru in 1975 and lived there until the age of 17. Her father died when she was young, so she lived in Peru with her mother and two younger sisters. Jenny told me that life as a child in Peru was somewhat boring: she mostly just studied and spent the rest of her time at home. When she graduated high school at age 17, her mother told her that she could continue studying in Peru or she could go live in the United States with friends of the family. Jenny chose to go to the United States and study there. While we did not discuss her family's financial situation in Peru, it can be assumed that they lived comfortably, which made a move to the United States possible. Before going to the United States, Jenny traveled with a friend (her friend's father traveled a lot and I believe they traveled with him) through Colombia and Panama, and spent a few months living in Panama. It was there where she met her future husband, a Dominican, and Jenny says that they fell in love in Panama. Jenny continued on to the United States, where she spent 6 months in Los Angeles, and then came to Hyde Park to live with some family friends. Jenny stayed in touch with her future husband, and then when he came to Boston, she married him. At age 19, she was pregnant with her first child and living in Charlestown with her husband. Jenny has been dedicated to her children (she has had 2 more since then and is pregnant with a fourth) and at first also took time to learn English. As her kids grew slightly older, Jenny began running a family day care in her home, where she could take care of her own kids as well as other children. At age 23, she began working in Boca Grande, a Mexican restaurant on Mass. Av in Cambridge, and then later worked at the newer Boca Grande

in Brookline. A few years ago, she began a house cleaning company that she ran from her own house. When she became pregnant, she realized she could no longer run around as much cleaning and handing out flyers. But right then she was given the opportunity to start a restaurant (which is apparently easier!). Even though she might have preferred to own a truck that sells food (like tacos), she decided to open the restaurant instead. She has had time to set up the restaurant and hopes that all will be under control soon, since the baby is on its way! Jenny currently lives in Charlestown with her husband, her three children and her grandmother (who came from Peru to help care for the children). Jenny says that her grandmother is already thinking of going back!

Jenny Gomez saw the chance to open a restaurant as an exciting opportunity that she couldn't refuse. As I mentioned, she had thought about owning a food truck before, but had never really planned on owning a restaurant. But with her experience in Boca Grande, she thought that managing a restaurant is not that hard; it is just a matter of finding good workers and good organization. Currently, there are 3 people working in the restaurant: Jenny, her cousin and her aunt. Her uncle, who has experience in the food industry, backed out at the last minute, and Jenny laughed at the fact that they had no real cook. She says that they are getting by, though they are looking to hire someone else who has experience. Jenny decided to open a Mexican restaurant because in Somerville, Mexican food is universally recognized. She would like to one day serve Peruvian and/or Panamanian food, but she says that Peruvian cuisine mainly attracts Peruvians. Meanwhile, most of the clients at the store are white: they buy mostly tacos and burritos. Jenny commented that everyone likes Mexican food. Jenny is full of new ideas for the future. She wants to serve Mexican hot chocolate in the winter, and may also start serving flan. She would like to add Peruvian soups to the menu, perhaps have a "lunch menu of the day" and combine Panamanian techniques with Mexican techniques in the kitchen.

Jenny gave me lots of details about the experience of opening her business. Before they could open, Jenny had to have the signatures of many inspectors. Emergency lights and sprinklers had to be in place, the kitchen needed a new hood, the bathrooms needed signs and they had to buy fire extinguishers. The Salvadoran couple who owned a restaurant in the same location before were able to give Jenny advice about where to buy food and who to talk to. But Jenny has also faced a bit of discrimination simply because the restaurant that was there before them failed. For instance, Coca-Cola didn't want to sponsor the restaurant because they didn't

want to spend the money on a restaurant in that location. Jenny gets worried sometimes about the location on Highland Av., since there are not many people who pass by. But she says business is slowly getting better.

At the time she was ready to open, Jenny had all the signatures ready, but she had not yet gone to her hearing that enabled her to start full business. Luckily, one inspector suggested that she open the store and start selling food to go, which was legal to do before the hearing. She was able to open 2 weeks before the hearing, and if she hadn't had this opportunity, would have been paying rent for an unopened restaurant. Only after the hearing was she allowed to set up chairs and tables and make My Mexicano an "eat-in" restaurant. She was thankful for the support of this city inspector and said that, in general, she had a good experience with the City of Somerville. Jenny did not meet anyone who spoke Spanish, though she tried her best to speak English clearly and try to understand what everyone said. Jenny commented that the officials of the City are very serious; friendly, but not too friendly. She felt like the process wasn't too hard, yet that the officials didn't want to get too friendly with any owners for fear of misleading them.

Jenny has little contact with the Latino community in Somerville, since My Mexicano is not located in an area with lots of Latinos. She has had some Latino customers, but not many. She says that, generally, people are very timid in Somerville. Many people pass by the restaurant but are afraid to come in. Others come in for the first time and say "Oh, are you open?" not realizing that they pass by an "open" sign every day. Jenny noted that in the United States (at least in Massachusetts) people are less chatty; they don't share their lives with each other. This can make business difficult, since there is no real "community" that is out in the street and entering her restaurant.

Jenny likes the name "My Mexicano" since it combines English and Spanish, and made her menu after looking at menus from restaurants all over Boston. She tried to make her menu less confusing (there are no hidden prices or charges for "extra items") and priced it in the average price range. Jenny noted that in Brookline, for instance, prices are higher, while in East Boston, prices are lower. She is somewhere in the middle. As time goes on, the restaurant is becoming more organized. She has been teaching her cousin and aunt about cooking Mexican food, and they are gaining confidence. They are getting into the swing of things, and they know what has to be done each day and how to do it. Jenny has a lot to think about, with 3 kids, her pregnancy and a new restaurant. She seems relieved that things are calming down.

In the past few weeks, Jenny has had all sorts of problems, mostly due to bad luck. The gas didn't work on opening day, the menu came out with lots of typos, etc. But Jenny is confident that things will work out. Her husband was very skeptical at first, and wanted to do with the restaurant, but Jenny said that he doesn't understand the need to take a risk. Jenny is the type of person who sees an opportunity and takes it. She says that life is about taking risks, and when you lose, learning from the loss. Whether My Mexicano survives or not, it is still a success story.

My Mexicano is unique in the sense that it is a Mexican restaurant that is run by Peruvians and that caters to a mainly non-Latino population. Jenny had a lot to say about her experience with the Somerville government, though she had few complaints. In her interview, Jenny appeared to be a very optimistic person, which led me to believe that when she sets her mind to something, she usually succeeds. Jenny is fortunate that she does not have everything at stake by opening the restaurant. In other words, Jenny seems confident that even if the restaurant fails, she has other ideas that will follow. Other business owners, who perhaps are not as young, creative and optimistic, don't always have backup plans or other options.

Since the restaurant is so new, it is hard to say what role it will play in the community. Perhaps the restaurant will not survive, in which case Jenny will move on to her next adventure. If it does survive, it will be because it gains a following among some Somerville community, whether this is a specific ethnic community or simply a neighborhood community. Although My Mexicano is very different from most of the other Latino-owned businesses we saw in Somerville, Jenny and her restaurant are part of the Somerville's Latino community.

LEO ZUÑIGA

TACOS LUPITA



Storefront of Tacos Lupita

Tacos Lupita, a Salvadoran and Mexican restaurant near Porter Square, is about to celebrate its fourth birthday. Leo Zuñiga, who is Mexican, opened the business four years ago with his wife, sister-in-law and brother-in-law (who are all Salvadoran). One year ago, Leo and his wife bought the others' shares, and Leo's sister-in-law opened a new restaurant in Lynn (this restaurant is not officially connected to Tacos Lupita). In this interview, I (David Pistrang) focused on how Leo's experience owning a business in a less commercial neighborhood compared to the experience of owning a business in an area like East Somerville. Since Leo used to live and work in Los Angeles, much of the interview also focused on differences between Somerville and Los Angeles.

The interview was conducted entirely in Spanish on October 22, 2003. Although Leo speaks some English, he preferred to do the interview in Spanish. Leo provided thoughtful answers to many questions, and I chose to transcribe his interview for an assignment for my class.

Leo Zuñiga was born in the state of Puebla, Mexico on August 18, 1962. He lived in Mexico until the age of 21, when he moved with his sister and her family to the United States. Leo lived in California for over 15 years, working various jobs in textiles, mechanics and then food vending. Leo began selling food from his home in California, and then opened a catering truck selling tacos. He saw that taco trucks were successful in Los Angeles, and he had a few family members who helped him get started. Leo met his wife in Los Angeles, and four years ago, they moved with their 11-year-old daughter to Boston. Leo's wife already had family here in Boston, and they came to open Tacos Lupita with his wife's sister and her husband. The two couples opened the business together, and one year ago, the other couple sold their portion to Leo. Now just Leo and his wife own Tacos Lupita. Leo used to live in East Boston, but his family recently moved to a house in Methuen.

Like my other interviews, I began by asking Leo about his experience coming to the United States. Leo told me that he decided to go to the U.S. because there are more opportunities here. While there was work in Mexico, there were better chances to succeed in a job here in the United States. Leo remembers that adjusting to the language was the hardest part of coming to the United States, and the language barrier is still difficult today. He noted that Los Angeles has everything that Mexico has, and people speak Spanish everywhere. He is forced to speak English

much more in Boston and Methuen than he had to in California. Leo also joked about Boston's weather, and told me he misses Mexico and California. He still has two sisters in Mexico.

Leo is happy to be in the food business, and started working in the food business because he saw it as a dependable job. While he does not consider himself a cook ("Cocinero no soy!" he told me), he knows how to prepare fast food items such as tacos. Tacos Lupita offers some non-fast food items (such as soups and meat platters), though Leo's wife and the other two women who work in the restaurant do this cooking.

The process of opening Tacos Lupita was difficult for Leo, but not too difficult. At the time they were opening in December 1999, Leo was still living in California and flying back and forth between LA and Boston. At times, he had to be separated from his wife and daughter for periods of months, which was difficult for him. Finally, Leo was able to fully move to Boston, and things gradually improved. Leo reported that the process of starting a business, in terms of contact and communication with the city of Somerville, was straightforward. They went to numerous meetings and a hearing, and with the signatures of numerous inspectors, were able to open. Once again, language was a barrier, though Leo said things went fine and he felt understood. However, he did not come across any Spanish speakers in the Somerville City government.

Tacos Lupita is located on a main street in a quiet part of town. There are Latinos in the area, though the area is not primarily Latino. They chose the location on Elm St. since the space opened up, and Leo describes the exact location as "no muy buena pero no muy mala." While the restaurant is a five-minute walk from the busy commercial area of Porter Square, Elm Street has few passing pedestrians. The restaurant has all types of clients, including white Americans, Central Americans, Mexicans and South Americans. Leo thinks that the menu, which includes Mexican and Salvadoran specialties, helps attract a greater number of clients. Since his wife is Salvadoran, they decided to serve both Mexican and Salvadoran food. The most popular items are tacos, burritos and pupusas.

Although Leo doesn't live in Somerville, he does feel like he is a part of the Latino community in the city. He does not see much division between Latinos of different origins, and sees that there are many groups of friends with people from multiple countries. Leo tries to get his business involved and known in the community, by donating food to cultural events and to some church events (I didn't ask which church...). They also advertise on Radio Hispano (1600

AM). While he is not good friends with many other Latino business owners, he knows quite a few of them. Leo was able to list many of the business owners that we have met in East Somerville, though he does not know about any plans for an organization of Latino business owners in the city. (I told him that we had heard that Tony, owner of Los Amigos, might be forming an organization of Latino businesses, though it appears that not much has been done so far. Leo had heard nothing about this). Leo is not sure of his plans for the future, though he and his wife are thinking about opening up another Tacos Lupita either in the Watertown/Waltham area, or else closer to their home in Lawrence or Methuen.

Like all the business owners that we have talked to, Leo says there is little/no support from the Somerville government. He didn't have too many suggestions for ways that the mayor could do a better job, although he commented that more free parking near his restaurant would be helpful. After nearly four years of business, Tacos Lupita has a loyal following and has made a name for itself in Central Somerville. Business is steady and Leo seems proud of his accomplishments. Plus, their pork tacos are the best around!

A valuable lesson from this interview is that Somerville is a very different type of city than Los Angeles or New York City. While Latinos might be able to live their life in Los Angeles without any contact with non-Latinos, living in Somerville forces business owners and all people to come in contact with all types of people. A big challenge for Leo, and most other business owners we talked to, was English. In order to get a business started, someone has to know English. Plus, on a daily basis, Leo speaks more English here in Somerville than he did in Los Angeles.

Another important lesson from this interview was the notion that there is a bond between all Latinos in Somerville. Leo said that he sees little difference between Mexicans and Salvadorans, for example, and that he has friends of different nationalities. While Nelson Salazar commented that he thinks Latinos from different countries have little in common, Leo saw the opposite.⁹ He said that he sees Mexicans and Salvadorans eating together, and oftentimes Mexicans or Peruvians come to Tacos Lupita specifically to order Salvadoran food. While Leo did not talk much about contact with the Brazilian or Haitian communities, he made it clear that a) he feels like he is a part of the Latino community, even though the Latino community is mostly non-Mexican and b) there is not too much division between nationalities, but rather, a

⁹ Interview with Leo Zuñiga, October 22, 2003

bond that exists between all Latinos in Somerville. His notions were shared by most of the interviewees we talked to over the course of the semester.

STORES – AN OVERVIEW

OVERVIEW

A quick look at East Broadway will reveal signs posted everywhere in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Goods in the windows are often souvenirs from Latin American countries, and stores and restaurants sell Central American foods and many stores sell music in Spanish.

There is a wide selection of stores in Somerville. There are three Latino-owned clothing stores that we were able to locate, almost all in a three block radius. There was also one music store that specialized mostly in Salvadoran groups and other Latin American groups. Throughout the other stores it was easy to see that many served as multipurpose stores, with sections devoted to food, clothing, music, cleaning , books or anything else.

To me, that was one of the most interesting aspects of Latino-owned businesses in Somerville. Many appear to have a hodge-podge of goods. Also almost all goods were sold at very affordable prices. This appears to be the best way to market in the community. Many stores mentioned that they were open very late because many of the Latinos in the community worked very late at night. Many of the stores also open very early in the morning. Perhaps the hodge-podge is a way to increase one stop shopping. For a community of very busy people, being able to go to one store for everything appears to be very important.

They said most of their business comes from word of mouth advertising. Even though many of the stores on the same street sell similar goods, no store owner appeared worried about competition. Few of the store owners we talked to did a lot of advertising.

As far as reaching out to and interacting in other local communities, many said that most ethnic communities keep to themselves and patronize their own co-ethnic stores. For example, on Broadway and in Union Square there are as many Latino stores as Portuguese and Brazilian stores, and there are probably more Portuguese and Brazilian stores. Most owners said they had few Brazilian clients. Except Milagro Garcia said in her interview that Brazilian clients come to her boutique for dresses just as frequently as Latinos. Milagro has learned some Portuguese, which she believes helps. She was firm in stating that if you don't speak the language it is hard to sell to customers. Many of the business and store owners we interviewed expressed a desire to be trilingual.

MILAGRO GARCÍA

MILAGRO'S BOUTIQUE



Milagro García left El Salvador on May 14, 1988 to immigrate to the US. She had a brother in Los Angeles, and first settled there. She left her family and immigrated by herself. A year later she had earned enough money to send for other members of her family. This fact in itself says a lot about Milagro Garcia.

Milagro is a hard working woman, and she is finally bearing the fruits of her labor. Her store, Milagro's Boutique, located on Broadway has become an East Somerville institution. Milagro's Boutique specializes in affordable children's clothing, and party clothes, particularly women's evening attire. She says she has been successful because in Somerville Milagro says the people have frequent parties, whether it is a *quinciniara*, first communion, or wedding.

Milagro moved to Somerville after living in Los Angeles. A cousin of her ex-husband told her that if she came to Somerville, she could have two jobs, she sensed the economic opportunity and moved to Somerville. Upon arrival she worked for a bakery called Brasila and in the Signature Bread factory. After a long time, she decided that she wanted to be more independents. She went to Roxbury community college to learn English and receive a GED.

On August 21, 1998 she opened her own business, Milagro's Boutique on Broadway in East Somerville. Milagro chose to locate her store on Broadway based on the fact that it was on a main street. She chose to open a clothing boutique because after visiting her brother in Los Angeles, she knew that these clothes would be sold frequently, and she knew of a factory in Los Angeles. She was able to arrange a special relationship with the factory where they know that she will buy last year's dresses. This enables her to sell the dresses, sometimes for as little as \$25.

At the time she opened the store her youngest daughter was 21 and throughout the past five years both women have worked alongside each other in the boutique. Her daughter often helps her with issues of translations and papers.

She has faced her share of problems over the years. She has instituted Telecheck, a service that verifies checking accounts because before many people would want to write her a check and it wasn't good. She also has a security television that is highly visible when you enter the store. In the beginning, when there were often many customers in the store, she said that people would steal dresses from her, particularly in the dressing room. She believes the security inspires more respect. The rent for the store is over \$1,000 per month, she says, and at first she

had to work two jobs from 7 in the morning until 11 at night to pay for the store. The rent has increased in the past five years.

In the local business community she says she does not really have any competition. In fact, she says she never worries about it. There is another store like hers in Cambridge, on Cambridge Street, but she doesn't believe it poses any threat to her own store. Milagro says she doesn't even advertise. She knows her store is well thought of in the community.

“Las amigas. Una amiga le dice a otra. Y así, se haciendo la publicidad.”¹⁰

“The girlfriends. One girlfriend tells another. And this way I advertise.”

Something that she says has helped her business in recent years is the tremendous growth of the Latino Community. Her customers are largely Brazilians, Puerto Ricans, South Americans and Central Americans, she says.

It is clear that in the five years that Milagro has had her store open, that its popularity has only grown.

¹⁰ Emily Chasan. Interview with Milagro García.

LUIS SERRANO

99 PLUS STORE



Storefront of 99 Plus Store

Luis Serrano is one of two young business owners interviewed in this project. Unlike most of the business owners we talked to, Luis did not start the business himself, rather bought it from a friend. Luis moved to Boston before he knew about the store, but decided to stay because he had the opportunity to run the 99 Plus Store. The 99 Plus Store is a variety store that focuses on religious items and music, but also sells other household products and gifts. I (David Pistrang) asked Luis about his motivations for owning and managing the store, and how he views the community in East Somerville as a business area. 99 Plus Store is located on Broadway, right in the heart of the commercial area. Other topics that came up in the interview were his relationship with his neighbors (other businesses), the role of the city of Somerville in offering support, as well as Luis' struggle to overcome the great obstacle of not speaking perfect English.

I conducted the interview in Spanish since Luis does not speak much English. Although I had met him three times before the first interview, Luis was still timid and did not usually give elaborate answers to my questions. However, the interview offered the unique perspective of a new business owner in East Somerville.

Luis Serrano was born in El Salvador in 1977. At the age of 20 (in 1997) he left El Salvador for California. Luis spent about four months in California before moving to Atlanta, where he lived with his brother for five years. In Atlanta, Luis worked in construction. When he came to Boston for a visit for the first time about a year ago, he planned to work here but eventually move back to Atlanta. Instead, he was given the opportunity to buy the 99 Plus Store from the former owner (a relative or family friend). Luis decided to buy the business four months ago and stay in Boston. He currently lives with his sister in East Boston and works in the 99 Plus Store everyday. "Dios me ha bendecido con este negocio," says Luis (God has blessed me with this business). Luis is only 26 years old, and in the future would like to raise a family. He does not know what the future has in store, though he sees his first business as an initial step on a path to success.

The 99 Plus Store in Somerville sells a variety of products. The focus of the store is religious items, ranging from bibles to CDs to other Christian books. The store also sells other household items: bowls, books, toys, silverware, hats, incense, cards. The store resembles "The Dollar Store" but with a Christian influence. Luis told me that he had little time to buy the business and get organized. A first-time business owner, Luis works at the store everyday and has no other employees. When I asked how the work is going so far, he commented that it is

sometimes boring. The work is "no matado pero cansado" he said, laughing at himself for using a Salvadoran phrase. Luis had a dream of owning his own "negocito" and is thankful to God that he has the store.

Luis was quick to say that the biggest challenge he has faced as a business owner so far is the language barrier. Although Luis knows a fair amount of English, he is not confident and still lacks vocabulary. When I was at his store a week ago, a non-Latina woman was there looking for index cards. She did not know how to say the word in Spanish, and Luis was unable to help her (with my help it was determined that the store has no index cards). Before the interview, Luis called a sub place to order a sandwich and immediately asked if there was someone who knew Spanish. The closest he got was a Portuguese speaker, which made ordering a sandwich only slightly less difficult. Luis says that it is still hard not knowing the names of all the items in his store. While many of his customers are Latinos, other people from the community shop there as well.

Luis's experience with the city of Somerville was similar to Esther Flores' (Esther is the owner of Peru Travel). Luis commented that although there were not many obstacles, there was not much support from the city. Luis did not meet any city officials who spoke fluent Spanish, which made things like figuring out tax forms and transfer of ownership difficult. Luis commented that it took a lot of time. Luis says that if he were the mayor of Somerville, he would take the time to help small businesses grow and benefit the community. He also sees the importance of talking to people and getting a sense of the different places people come from. Even for a newcomer to Somerville, it is easy to recognize Somerville's diversity.

Luis sees a strong community in East Somerville. When asked to describe the community, Luis said that people were very hardworking, and that he didn't see a huge difference between Latinos and any other groups. Luis knows the other business owners on his block, who are also Latino, and although he doesn't know of any official organization of businesses, he feels that there is a community amongst the owners. He likes living in Boston, though was not able to clearly explain the differences he saw between here and Atlanta. He did comment however that the Latino community here is very welcoming of other Latinos. Since most people come here with the goal of helping their families back in their country, people share the experience and help one another.

It is meaningful for Luis that he owns a Christian store. He feels that his faith has brought him this far, and he wants to share this faith with others. One of his primary goals is to help other people make the transition into a new life in the United States, a transition which was (and still is) difficult for Luis. The saying "hay que sembrar para cosechar para el día de mañana" is meaningful for Luis and the people Luis helps.¹¹ A basic translation would read: You have to plant a seed today for tomorrow's harvest. Luis wants to help others have faith that their hard work will pay off. He wants to give hope to the hopeless and calm those who feel lost or rejected. Although he does not go to church in Somerville (he goes to church in Boston), Luis feels that he forms part of the religious community in Latino Somerville. He likes helping other people, and feels that his business contributes to the community. Luis is also planting a seed for himself. He is doing very well, and I am confident that he has a bright future in his business or whatever life he chooses in the future.

¹¹ Interview with Luis Serrano, October 10, 2003

YONY ORANTES

BAZAR EL SALVADOR



Yony Orantes came to Boston from El Salvador to live permanently in the U.S. in June of 2001. He is from El Salvador. He had been to visit California and Massachusetts as early as 1998 for a month or so every once and a while, but he finally decided to settle in Somerville permanently. He is a cousin of Milagro García.

Yony is one of the few business owners we spoke to, who seems to have maintained his status as a business owner throughout the entire immigration process. Though some of the other owners we interviewed worked in factories to save money to eventually open their own business or bring family over, Yony, in part, moved to Somerville because he would be able to own a business there. In El Salvador Yony owned and ran his own grocery store.

His final decision to immigrate here, came when Milagro told him the woman who owned Bazar El Salvador was looking to retire, and wanted a buyer for her business. Bazar El Salvador had been established in the community previously for seven years. He negotiated the sale of the business through Milagro, and moved with his family to Somerville.

His daughter, who is now in kindergarten, and his wife, María Lemos, immigrated from El Salvador with him. Yony and his family live in East Boston. They also bought a car when they first came here, and they commute from their home to Somerville everyday

He says he decided to immigrate based on the economic opportunity.

“La concesión entre nosotros, los latinos, es que acá en este país encontramos mejores oportunidades que en nuestra país. Hay estabilidad política donde hay oportunidad de empezar un negocio.”

“The concession among us Latinos, is that here in this country we find better opportunities than in our own country. There is political stability where there is the opportunity to begin a business.”

He thought the business was already well-known in the community and it would be a good opportunity. Bazar El Salvador specializes in small gifts as well as decorations for weddings, baby showers and *quincinieras* and other celebrations. They have items that they sell in the store, and others that they will make upon request. His wife works in the store with him, and she focuses on filling those orders. His busiest time of the year is around Christmas and in June around graduation and mother's day time

He says the store is getting too small for his business. He has had to dedicate half of the showroom to storage. He hopes to expand the business further and hopefully move it to a larger location.

Though Yony appears to be only middle aged, he said that his age played a large role in his decision to run his own business.

“Ya para la edad mía ya es bastante difícil encontrar un empleo acá porque los trabajos quieren mucha capacidad y la gente mayor tiene cierta, cierta limitaciones. “

“Already at my age it is very difficult to find a job here because the jobs want a lot of capacity and the older people have certain limitations.”

As a relatively new immigrant, Yony seems to be very pleased with his new country. He says he knows almost no English, but his wife knows some English and Milagro’s daughter often helps them if they are having trouble

SUPERMARKETS – AN OVERVIEW

Latin American supermarkets are important Latino businesses in Somerville. Unfortunately, we were only able to interview one owner of a supermarket, Nora Garnica. However, since we visited many (if not all) Latino-owned supermarkets in Somerville, we got a good grasp on the role they play in the community. Latin American grocery stores were one of the first Latino businesses to open in Somerville, since one of the first things demanded by an immigrant population is a source for food from their home countries. The supermarket owners we talked to told us that they import food from New York City, or else from larger supermarkets or retailers in other parts of Boston (which probably get their food from New York City as well). Supermarkets often sell produce and basic food items that can be used in most Latin American (especially Caribbean and Central American) cuisine. Items like plantains, beans and spices are common to most Central Americans, so people from multiple nationalities can shop in one place.

La Internacional, owned by Nora Garnica, and Los Amigos, owned by Tony Morales, are the two oldest Latin American supermarkets in Somerville. Today, there is a smattering of other small stores throughout the cities. We also visited Hispana American Variety on Medford Street. During the semester, the Latino Americas market at 491 Broadway (in Magoun Square) moved further east to Medford Street. More recently, large supermarkets in Somerville (such as Star Market and Market Basket) have begun catering to the Latino community, selling many of the same produce and products that are sold in the Latino markets. Similarly, there are also several Brazilian markets in Somerville, and here too there is an overlap in products. The main advantage that still remains for Latin American grocery stores is that people feel comfortable shopping in a place where Spanish is spoken. People are often very loyal customers, and even if switching shopping locations makes sense, many people keep shopping in the same place.

La Internacional, owned by Nora and Eduardo Garnica, opened in 1989, at a time when no other Latin American markets existed in the area of Union Square. Before Latin American markets existed in Somerville, people from the city (not to mention other northern suburbs like Medford and Malden) had to drive to Jamaica Plain or East Boston to go shopping. Today, small bodegas and supermarkets like La Internacional exist in many parts of Somerville, though people still come in from other towns to do their shopping. For example, although La Internacional is in

Union Square, Nora thinks that most of her customers do not live right in the neighborhood. Loyal customers make the drive from wherever they are.

There is more to find out about Latin American grocery stores in Somerville and in greater Boston. It would be interesting to see what it is like opening a new bodega today compared to how it was in 1989. More research could be done in this area to find out more about other supermarket owners' experiences. For now, we have the story of Nora Garnica and her husband, which hopefully gives an idea of what owning a Latin American supermarket is like.

NORA GARNICA

LA INTERNACIONAL FOOD CORP.



Emily Chasan, Evelin Santos and Nora Garnica inside La Internacional

Since La Internacional is the oldest Latino-owned business that we visited, we focused much of the interview on the changes that Nora has seen in the community over the years. We asked her about her experience with the local government, her interactions with both the Latino communities and other communities, and specific ways her business has changed over time. The interview, which I (David Pistrang) conducted with the help of Emily Chasan and Evelin Santos, lasted about one hour and went very well. This interview went smoothly since we had three Spanish speakers ready to ask follow up questions. The interview went more quickly, and Evelin was also able to help Emily and I understand the few Spanish words that were difficult.

Nora Estela Garnica was born in Guatemala in 1960 and came to the United States in 1981 at the age of 21. She was the first one from her family to come to the United States, and came legally (with a visa) to live in Boston. When she first arrived, she moved in with her cousins in Alston and began looking for work. She was here three months without work and then finally found a job working in a factory. Nora remembers that the factory made plastic badges and that most of the workers were Latinos. The only white people in the factory were the bosses and supervisors. Later on she moved on to work at a fish packing factory before marrying Eduardo Garnica in October of 1982. The two of them moved to Somerville. Evelin made a comment about Nora marrying very young, and Nora explained that before she was married, it was very hard living without her family. Nora implied that one reason she married so young was because she was eager to have family again. Nora described the first few years in the United States as difficult, especially since when she left Guatemala, she knew that she would not be able to return to see her family for a while. While Nora's family was clearly not among the poorest in Guatemala, her family did not have much money or many opportunities there. She came to the United States so that she and future generations would have better lives. Later on, after Nora was married, more of her family came to the United States. They first lived with Nora and her husband, then moved to their own houses. Nora says that most of her family now lives in the Boston area, including her parents and siblings. Nora, her husband and their two sons (ages 18 and 12) live near Union Square in Somerville.

We began by asking Nora about the history of the store. Nora told us that in 1989, both she and her husband were without work. Her husband decided that "no quería trabajar más para nadie" (he didn't want to work for anyone anymore) so they decided to open their own business.

¹² They considered opening a clothing store, but then decided on a food store. They lived on Medford Street at the time, and looked for a place to open their store. They originally thought that Cambridge would be a better option, but in the end found a spot in Union Square. Latino grocery stores didn't exist in Somerville at the time, only in Cambridge. Along with Tony from Los Amigos, Nora and Eduardo were the pioneers of Latino markets in Somerville.

Eduardo and Nora opened E&N Tropical Market in 1989, and started selling foods from many parts of Latin America. They sold very few "American" (from the USA) products, but many items from South America, Central America and the Caribbean. "Nosotros no comemos casi la comida Americana" says Nora (We practically don't eat American food).¹³ Nora commented that opening a business was hard work, especially because you can never be sure who your clients will be. Ever since they opened, the Haitian community has made up the majority of the clientele at the store. Nora told us that the Haitian community, perhaps not always treated well (especially due to skin color), felt comfortable in her store. Since the foods are similar in Haiti and Central America, many Haitians found what they needed in the store, and also felt welcome. Nora speaks very little Creole, and I observed that the transactions between Haitians and the staff at the store are generally in English. Meanwhile, when a Spanish speaking customer enters, transactions are made in Spanish. While Nora notes that she has many long-time customers, there are also more and more new people coming to the store everyday. Many people drive from Medford, Malden or Cambridge to shop, and others regularly stop by for necessities after a larger shopping trip to the nearby Market Basket supermarket. Union Square is not a big Latino commercial center: aside from La Internacional, there is just a Peruvian restaurant and a night club. Otherwise, other minority owned businesses are Brazilian or Asian. La Internacional has managed to survive in Union Square because they cater to a wide range of people.

Nora and Eduardo buy most of the food they sell from a New York City company called Cuba Tropica. Nora is currently in charge of most of the small orders, while Eduardo takes care of the biggest orders. Both Eduardo and Nora work in the store, although usually Nora comes in later (at 10 AM) and also stays later (till 9 PM). In 1990 they expanded their store to include videos and music. In reality, they bought and connected to the store next door, which had previously been owned by an American who had lived in Guatemala. Opening their business in

¹² Interview with Nora Garnica, October 16, 2003

¹³ Interview with Nora Garnica, October 16, 2003

1989 was challenging, but since Eduardo speaks English quite well, they had few difficulties with the city of Somerville. Nora told us that they had to get licenses to sell items like milk, cigarettes and ice cream, and that they had to go make a business proposal at City Hall before getting started. This is the case with all supermarkets, and starting a new business is always a lot of work. Nora also remembers that fixing up the building took a lot of money and time.

While Nora had no specific problems with the Somerville government, she does not feel that there is a lot of support. However, she does not feel that owning a business in Somerville is more difficult for Latinos, and noted that since the store was *aimed* at Latinos, she does not have a huge amount of contact with other people in Somerville. Nora's main complaint is that the city won't give her an unloading zone in front of her store, which causes problems when trucks come to make deliveries. Nora says that she has asked for this zone many times but the city says no, arguing that there already exists an unloading zone on the other side of the street. This is not good enough for Nora. She also comments that many shoppers would like a parking lot, since street parking is limited (and metered). Finally, Nora notes that today there are a lot more Latinos, as well as Brazilians, on the streets of Somerville than there were in 1989. While most of the clients are still Haitians, there are a number of Brazilians and Latinos who come to the store as well, and their numbers are growing.

Nora does not feel that there is much of a community of business owners in Union Square nor in Somerville. She thinks that an organization of Latino businesses would be helpful for additional support. E&N Tropical Market changed to La Internacional Corp. a few years ago when Nora and Eduardo incorporated. Nora told us that as a corporation they have more rights to defend themselves. Although things in recent years have been fine, Nora and Eduardo dealt with burglary and security before. They still have security cameras throughout the store, but they haven't had any crime problems in recent years. Nora feels a part of the Latino community in Somerville, and sees little division between Guatemalans, Salvadorans and even other groups like Brazilians.

La Internacional is now a Somerville landmark. Nora and Eduardo have hung up a map in their store made by the Somerville Chamber of Commerce. The map shows Somerville's major streets and major businesses. La Internacional appears to be the only Latino business that is on the map (Broadway and East Somerville are barely there at all, though it is possible that Los

Amigos was on it). Nora and her husband have a successful business and have a large and steady clientele.

SERVICES - AN OVERVIEW

The incorporation of services into the Latino economy in Somerville is important in showing the stability of the community. Many of the services owned by Latinos cater directly to the community of Latinos, and have expanded their role into the larger community. Using their own personal resource of being Latino, and being able to easily relate to their customers, Latino-owned services have been able to create a powerful economic base. Once doing so, knowledge of their business in other local ethnic communities grows, and so does their client base.

Lopesa Services is using a niche market of providing bilingual accounting services, and hopefully trilingual in the future. Other services like Choices Night Club, offer a distinctly Latino environment. Many of the hairdressers in East Somerville indicate that they speak a number of different languages.

Another service, of crucial importance, is ACCION Internacional, a microlender. It was started by a Somerville native who was not Latino, but currently is run by president and CEO Maria Ottero. It provides microlending services to small business owners in Latin American Countries, Africa, and ten US cities, many of which are Latino-owned small businesses.

There was also a Salvadoran lawyer we learned of, as well as mechanics. Many service owners believe the Latino community seeks them out because they prefer discussing more complicated things like law, taxes, cars, or even chatting with a hairdresser in their native language. Many of the service owners advertised over the Spanish Radio and local Spanish television stations.

The Latino service sector in Somerville appears to be growing. Also, as Latinos continue to become more established, demand for services in Somerville may become increased.

ESTHER FLORES

PERU TRAVEL



Esther Flores at her desk in Peru Travel

Esther Flores, owner of Peru Travel in East Somerville, has a lot of experience in the travel agency business. Before she opened her own agency four years ago, she worked in East Boston and in Jamaica Plain. Esther had a lot to say about owning a business in East Somerville. Because she is not Central American, I asked her what it was like to work in a mostly Central American neighborhood, and how she fits in with the Latino community.

The interview was conducted entirely in Spanish, even though Esther speaks fluent English. She told me (David Pistrang) that she likes speaking in her first language, and she was clearly willing to do so even with me (someone who's Spanish is good but not perfect). The interview took place in her office on October 1, 2003, and lasted about 40 minutes.

Esther Flores was born in Lima, Peru and lived there until age 19. Her mother moved to Massachusetts when Esther was still young, so when she came to the United States 12 years ago with her brothers, she moved in with her mother in Hyde Park. In Peru, Esther finished grade school early, at the age of 15, and then went on to study tourism and hotel management at the university there. When she came to Boston, she continued studying tourism and hotel management at the university here, and also took courses in English. With the help of their mother, Esther and her younger brother Gustavo opened Peru Travel in Jamaica Plain in 1994. Soon after, Esther got married, moved to Revere, and opened another travel agency in East Boston with her husband (Las Americas Travel). Three years ago, Esther switched locations again and opened her own travel agency, Peru Travel, in Somerville. The two Peru Travels are independent, one still owned by Gustavo, the other owned by Esther. Esther still lives in Revere, with her two daughters, ages 5 and 9. She still has family in Peru, and frequently flies there to visit.

I began the interview by asking more about Esther's experience in the travel agency business. As I mentioned before, Esther began working in 1994 at Peru Travel in Jamaica Plain. Esther told me that it was originally her mother's idea to open a travel agency. Since Esther was studying tourism, her mother suggested that she teach her skills to her brother so that they could open a travel agency in Boston that focused on travel to Peru and other parts of Latin America. Back then, there were no other Latin American focused travel agencies in Boston; the closest one was in New York City. They chose to open their business in Jamaica Plain because there was a large Dominican and Puerto Rican population, but also because the neighborhood was close to their house. Esther told me that in the beginning, they had clients from all over (Newton,

Framingham, Medford, etc.) since they were one of the first Latin American travel agencies. Esther also noted that because much of the contact is done by phone, location wasn't crucial.

After a short time working at Peru Travel, Esther started Las Americas Travel in East Boston with her husband. By this time, more and more Latin American travel agencies were opening in the Boston area, and since East Boston has a large Latino population (and is a good distance away from Jamaica Plain), they chose to open there. Esther noted that the location of this store, across the street from the Maverick T Station, helped business. When Esther decided to open her own store three years ago, she decided on East Somerville. Esther had noticed that the community had grown a lot and that there were many Latinos, although she commented that there are Latinos everywhere. She thought Somerville was a good location due to the large Latino population and Brazilian population, as well as its proximity to Malden, Medford, Everett and Revere (where she still lives). Esther noted that many of the old clients from 9 years ago now go to her travel agency instead of her brother's simply because it is closer to their home. All three agencies, she said, offer pretty much the same services.

Peru Travel offers airplane tickets and vacation planning for much of Latin America. Most of the clients who come to arrange flights are Latinos returning home, though Esther said that she does have non-Latino clients. Although many clients are Peruvian, there are also lots of Mexicans, Guatemalans, Salvadorans, Colombians and Brazilians who come in to Peru Travel. Like most travel agencies, Peru Travel offers money transfers to any place in the world. They also do shipments to Peru and other Latin American countries, and recently Peru Travel began doing real estate, mostly for Latino families looking for houses in the Metro Boston area. Money transfers are very common at Peru Travel, as they are at all stores that offer them. Many Latin Americans send money back home, and Peru Travel is a good place for Portuguese and Spanish speakers since Esther helps them translate forms and explains things in their language. Since Esther is trilingual (Spanish, Portuguese and English), Peru Travel caters to a large percent of the Somerville population.

I asked Esther to tell me about her experience starting a new business in Somerville, and whether being Latina had any positive or negative effect on this process. She said that while starting a new business wasn't easy, she did not face too many difficulties. She chose Broadway because it is a big commercial area, although originally, before buying the office, the agency used a backroom at the nearby Brazilian supermarket. Esther told me that the city of Somerville

offered her no support when she was starting her business. She didn't encounter any huge challenges, but never did anyone from the city come and talk to her or offer help or advice, which she knows DOES happen in other cities. When Esther worked near Maverick T Station in East Boston, she received flyers and notices from the city that told them about events and meetings for the community. She felt that in East Boston, the business community was organized. Esther told me that she never had difficulties due to being Latina, though she realizes that Latina business owners are rare. She is proud of herself for opening her own business.

While there was never direct support from the city of Somerville, Esther does feel a connection to the community of East Somerville. Esther feels a connection to the largely Central American and Brazilian community even though she is Peruvian. She enjoys working in a largely Salvadoran community, and thinks positively of her situation. She began learning Portuguese three years ago, and has a lot of contact with Brazilians as well (her block of Broadway is mostly Brazilian businesses). She feels that there is a sense of community in East Somerville which is not necessarily divided by languages or ethnicity. Esther told me that she is often invited to the functions and events of the other Brazilian storeowners on her street. However, she agrees with other interviewees that there is no organized business community in East Somerville, or Somerville as a whole. Meanwhile, in East Boston, she felt that there was. Esther often thinks about expanding her travel agency by hiring another person, probably Brazilian, who can help expand the market to the Brazilian population. She has no plans now to leave her company or switch careers, since she enjoys her work.

Esther knows how to do her job and knows how to do it well. The entire time I was in her office, the phones were ringing, and the other woman who works for Esther, Flor Soto, was quite busy. People passed by the window and waved to Esther as we talked, and one man (non-Latino) came in to the store (seemingly for his first time ever) to send money. This was the first time I had even heard Esther speaking English, which she did perfectly, and the man seemed pleasantly surprised by the friendly service at Peru Travel. It is clear that Esther is a successful businesswoman who knows what it takes to own a travel agency.

Esther owes some of her success to the support she has received from her family. Without the family network that she had when she came to the United States, starting a business (especially finding the capitol to start it) would have been impossible. Esther thinks that this support has had a lot to do with her success, though she also thinks that with hard work and

determination, running a business is not too hard. While there are clearly class differences amongst the Latino community in Somerville, Esther does not let this get in the way of business. She enjoys the community she works with, and her business serves all people. People who can afford to take trips back home obviously have money to spend, but since the business also offers other services, all people feel welcome in Peru Travel.

AMILCAR LOPEZ

LOPESA SERVICES



Photos: October, 12, 2003

Amilcar Lopez immigrated to the United States from Guatemala in 1975. He came with his mother and brother and sister. He was 15 years old. Amilcar and his family first settled in the Brighton, Allston area in Massachusetts. He graduated from Brighton High School, and the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, where he majored in business management. He later married and moved to Cambridge and later Somerville, Massachusetts. Now he and his family live in Andover, Massachusetts. He has three children.

Amilcar says his business processes about 4,000 clients a year. His busiest times are tax season from January 15 to April 15 every year. He says there are lines out the door and that it gets very busy and stressful. Amilcar thinks he loses some clients because they have to wait in line. He tries to increase his employees to combat the lines and has three full time employees. During tax season, he often has 11. He is hoping to grow to 15 employees for next season.

He started his own business in 1991, but was first only part time. In 1996 he decided to pursue his business on a full time basis. His business is called Lopesa Services, the name is a combination of both his last name, Lopez, and that of his wife's, Salazar. His business specializes in income tax returns for individuals and businesses, mortgages, and other financial services. He also refers clients to lawyers should he feel that they need more legal assistance, and will act as a consultant for other people in the industry.

He says he began the business in Somerville because he noticed a lack of financial and accounting services in the community and that people often had to travel far away from their community to find such services, particularly services like this that could accommodate a bilingual setting.

“The Spanish population was starting to grow quite a few years ago. So I thought it was a good opportunity to start a business here, this kind of business because they were going like far away. Everybody was going to East Boston.”

“In the last ten years the Spanish population has grown up a lot. One of my strengths is being able to speak both languages. When I started back in 1991, 32, the way I was thinking was, okay, I know in ten years I'm going to be doing good. With all of the people here and the number coming in, I said to myself ten years from now I should have my own business and that's what happened.”

Amilcar is an astute businessman. You can tell he is educated about the industry and has a keen business sense that has developed over the years. He is friendly, and you can tell immediately why his customers are loyal.

“Most people trust somebody who speaks their own language, so that’s an issue. People want to be able to understand what they’re doing,” he said in his interview.

Bilingualism and maintaining his culture is an important part of his life. Not only does he understand the economic opportunities for bilingual people, but he also believes the best way to learn a language is to go to a country. One of his sons is going to school in Guatemala now for two years, and he maintains a Spanish-speaking household.

Amilcar also prides himself on the integrity of his business. He feels it is one of the ways he is able to attract, and particularly to retain customers.

“There are good people, and people doing wrong things for their clients. Whenever somebody does something bad out there it is better for us,” he said.

He doesn’t see himself as just an accountant. Part of his role, he believes, is helping to train the community. In addition to teaching them how to do their income taxes, he wants to eventually help people do trusts for their children or grandchildren.

“If we train the clients on what we do, then they come back.”

“We do get a lot of clients who have problems with the IRS, so we do try to fix those issues.”

“They don’t know anything about income taxes, they don’t do that down there. You know, so they come down here and its like (kind of new). And then they hear of a different place and lets say someone who got \$3,000 refund. They go, ‘well how come I don’t get it?’ But everyone is different. Every client is different.”

He is very confident in his business and in its growth potential so he doesn’t worry too much about his competition. His business grew only 50 percent last year, but he said before that they were growing at a rate of 100 percent each year. He also has plans to try to attract the Portuguese-speaking population. He hopes to eventually take over the entire building at 94 Broadway and expand the office so that he can process customers more efficiently.

MARÍA GRASSO

MARYOM HAIR DESIGN



María “Maryom” Grasso came to the US from Venezuela in 1992 at the age of 21 by herself. Her sister had been living in the US for about eight to ten years before she came to join her. It was not her first time in Somerville. She has one son. She had come before on a vacation, but in the US she has always lived in Somerville. When she decided to stay in the US she studied English, and eventually went to work as a hairdresser in Cambridge. She had been a hairdresser in Venezuela as well.

Maryom decided to open her own business, Maryom Hair Design, in 1996. She says she did so, mostly because she always wanted to open her own shop and work closer to her home. Her customers come from all over and she said she has more responsibility and works more but she likes to be in control of her own life. However, she has not taken a vacation in seven years, and if she doesn’t have enough customers one day, sometimes she stays open longer. She has one employee and advertises her business on the radio occasionally.

She said it was difficult to open the business at first, and she has become somewhat hardened toward the rules of the government. Ironically, she says she is not very involved in politics, but she has quite a few political ideas. She did not have any difficulties as a Latino when she opened the business with the City of Somerville, but she says there should be some resources for Latino business owners on how to better establish their businesses.

“Fue un poco difícil, sí, porque así tienen muchas exigencias, muchas tonterías que no veo porque tienen. Porque todo es dinero...solo para cobrar dinero.”

“It was a little difficult, yes because they have these strict rules, and lots of stupid ones that I don’t know why they have them. Everything is for money...just to charge you money.”

She does not know many other business owners like herself, but she has seen many businesses open and close. She said if a business can last three years then it will probably be able to stay indefinitely.

Maryom does not worry much about the competition, even though there is a Portuguese hairdresser just down the street. She said the Brazilian and Latino communities are very separated, and that Spanish-speaking clients are more likely to come to her store, and Portuguese-speaking clients are likely to go to the other store. She is more concerned with the quality of service she offers her clients that will keep them coming back.

“Si tu trabajes y ofrecerles un buen servicio. Superarte.”

“If you work and offer them a good service, you will do okay.”

Maryom works very hard and says that now she is mostly tired of her business. She said she will probably only continue her business for a few more years and that it is time for her to do something else.

INFORMAL ECONOMY – AN OVERVIEW

Much of this report has focused on formal economic activity in Somerville businesses as recounted by local business owners. We have now devoted a section of this report to the informal economy, because since the beginning of this project our student partners have recognized this area is an important part of business transactions in the Latino community. We recognize that the many immigrants have as they come to the U.S. with an entrepreneurial spirit. In Somerville, this entrepreneurial spirit has been reflected both in formal and informal sectors. Many of our business owners come from a socio-economic class where they are more easily able to access funds and appropriate documents to begin their own formal business. The entrepreneurial spirit, however, is not limited to those in this socio-economic class, and others try to fill the margins with their own more informal businesses.

Informal business among friends is an important part of the Latino Business Community in Somerville. Whether it is making clothes, selling baked goods, or cooking *pupusas* this economic activity provides a way for members of the local community to use their own talents to preserve some of their traditions. Especially for women, making *pupusas*, chicken, or other baked goods for friends provides some entertainment and allows them to make some contribution to their family's income.

Somerville has a relatively tightly knit Latino community, and just as local consumers are likely to patron stores run by their friends, they are also likely to patron their friends directly. Throughout Somerville's Latino community informal buying and selling of goods occurs on a regular basis.

These informal economic processes usually take place through personal connections. According to Ana Bran, who earns some money by baking bread for her friends, informal business in Somerville is run through informal contracts. If someone wants to buy bread they will call her in advance to ask when she will be baking bread and to place an order. Upon finishing the order, Ana will be paid for her services. This is the most typical way that informal businesses are run in Somerville's Latino Community. These exchanges are based on personal relationships between friends.

Of course, more formal advertising mechanisms have developed in the community. In her interview, Ana Bran spoke of Church bake sales. Families bring their homemade Salvadoran

delicacies to sell after Church on Sundays. All proceeds go to the Church, Bran said. However, this event may also serve as advertising for the sellers. In the future, they may receive a call from someone they met at Church for an order of *pupusas*. In Milagro's Boutique there hangs a sign to call Graciela for "Freshly made *pupusas*."

Even during the course of the interview with Milagro García, a woman came into the store with a box of warm *pupusas* and traded them for decorations for her daughter's *quinciniera*. Arrangements between friends and businesses are common in the Somerville community, even on a formal basis. Businesses will sponsor soccer teams, and make trades. These kinds of arrangements are normal in any business community; the only difference in Somerville may be that there is a more frequent trade between formal and informal sectors. Activity of this sort shows how in Somerville, Latino business owners have an impact in the larger community. Though they may not be able to employ their friends directly, but through this informal social networking process business owners may be able to create jobs for their friends and opportunities for them to earn money as well.

In the interview process these informal economic processes were discovered only within Somerville's Salvadoran community, but it is possible that Latinos from other countries also participate. Obviously, this activity is not regulated by the government, but arrangements between friends are not illegal, and this is how Ana Bran always refers to her bread baking.

These informal arrangements may be a way to preserve some of what was typical of life in El Salvador in Somerville. Research by Jill Esbenshade in California has shown that when Latino immigrants participate in the informal economy is often work similar to what they have done in their native countries.¹⁴

The Latinos who participate in the informal economy are not exactly entrepreneurs, but under different circumstances they might have been. By becoming self-employed, Latino immigrants are able to create their own jobs and be active participants in their community.

¹⁴Jill Esbenshade. (1997) "The Politics of Day Labor: Denial and Access to Immigrant Workers." Oakland: National Network for Immigrants and Refugees. A summary report of her work is available at: http://www.nnir.org/news/archived_netnews/immigrantseconomyhtm.htm

ANA BRAN

BREAD BAKER



Photo: November 3, 2003

Ana Bran has lived in Somerville for almost two decades, making her one of the communities greatest historians. She says when she first arrived in Somerville, there were few Latinos in the area. She saw the first Latino store and the rest of the Latino business community in Somerville appear and she has seen the growth of the community firsthand.

Ana arrived in the US from El Salvador in 1986 to help solve a family crisis. Her daughter, who had already been living in Somerville since 1982 or 1983, had been in a severe car accident, and was four months pregnant at the time. Ana came to help her daughter recuperate, and she stayed with her family to help care for her grandson.

Ana is from the rural town of Ilopango in El Salvador. Before coming to the U.S. she worked in a bakery. She said she worked there, for maybe eight to ten hours per day. She was never married. She lives with her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren in Somerville. She has a son who still lives in El Salvador. He is married and has two daughters of his own.

In her spare time, she has taken her bread making skills from El Salvador, and she enjoys baking. She has friends that often call her and ask her to make bread for them. They buy the bread from her. She says she bakes the bread for them as sort of an entertainment, and a way to make some extra money. When she has enough extra money, she will buy little things for her own entertainment and often send it to her son in El Salvador.

She says she makes bread like this about once a week.

“Yo hago pan. Y alguna gente que me conoce le gusta, y le encarga. Pero un poquito. No un montón...Me llaman por teléfono y me preguntan si voy a hacer, y ellos me encargan de lo que quieren, como quesadilla de queso, solita de tortilla, o torta de yema.”¹⁵

“I make bread. And some people that know me like it and I charge them. But, just a little bit, not a lot...They call me on the phone and they ask if I’m going to make it, and they tell me what they want, like cheese quesadilla, tortilla or Salvadoran Yolk Cake.”

Her “customers” are friends that she meets in the church or other places. Ana is very involved in the Church and she also bakes her bread for Church bake sales, picnics, or bigger functions in the cafeteria.

Ana says that if she had arrived here when she was 25 she probably would have started her own bakery, but because she is older she was unable to do so.

SOMERVILLE LATINO BUSINESS DIRECTORY

Address	Phone	E-mail/Web	Owner	Nationality	Type
97 Broadway	617-623-7368		Amilcar Lopez	Guatemalan	Accounting
80 Broadway	617-628-2141		Lucy	Salvadoran	Clothing Shop
95 Broadway	617-591-9315		Milagro Garcia	Salvadoran	Clothing Shop
Pearl St. and Cross St					Clothing Shop
80 Broadway	617-625-			Colombian	Comm. Shop
Broadway			Luis Serrano	Salvadoran	Dollar Store
97 Broadway	617-666-5889		Yony Orantes	Salvadoran	Gift Shop
2 Main St.			Maryom Grasso	Venezuelan	Hairdresser
					Mechanic
444 Somerville Ave.			Rafael		Mechanic
		www.accion.org	Maria Otero,	Bolivian	Non-profit
97 Broadway	617-776-1200			Salvadoran	Record Store
99 Broadway	617-625-1999		CLOSED	Dominican	Restaurant
25 Union Square	617-623-7972	rosycorp@earthlink.net	Rosy Cerna	Peruvian	Restaurant
215 Highland Ave			Jenny Gomez	Peruvian	Restaurant
62 Broadway	617-629-3502		Maria	Guatemalan	Restaurant
44 Broadway	617-625-3830	tacoloco@aol.com		Salvadoran	Restaurant
13 Elm Street			Leo Zuñiga	Salvadoran	Restaurant
247 Washingtgon St.	617-776-5232	www.lataqueria.com	Roberto Rendon	Mexican	Restaurant
146 Broadway	617-628-8458			Salvadoran	Restaurant
82 Broadway	617-625-4119	Lmor77733@aol.com	Tony Morales	Saalvadoran	Restaurant
Medford Street	617-623-6495		Miguel	Salvadoran	Supermarket
318/322 Somerville Ave	617-776-8855		Nora E. Garnica	Guatemalan	Supermarket
Medford St.				Salvadoran	Supermarket
86 Brooadway	617-776-6009		Tony Morales/Luis	Salvadoran	Supermarket
381 Somerville Ave.	617-625-4975	information@clubchoices.bi	Shirley Ortiz		Night Club
Union Square			FL owner	Peruvian	Travel Agency
133A Broadway	617-628-7600	Perutiv2@cs.com	Esther Flores	Peruvian	Travel Agency

¹⁵ Emily Chasan. Interview with Ana Bran November 3, 2003.

Business Name
Lopesa Services
Lucy's Boutique
Milagro's Boutique
Somerville Communication
99 Plus Store
Bazaar El Salvador
Maryom Hair Design
A & M Motors
Autosal
ACCIO N Internacional
Hispanoamericana Record Shop
Las Palmeras Restaurant
Machu Picchu
My Mexicano
Restaurant "Los Paisanos"
Taco Loco
Tacos Lupita
Taqueria La Mexicana
Taqueria Montecristo
Taqueria Tapatio
Hispana American Variety
La Internacional Food corp.
Latino Americas Market
Los Amigos Market
Choices Night Club
Costamar
Peru Travel

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Limited to a semester of work we have tried to present an overview of the Latino Business Community in Somerville. We focused on themes of relationship to the government, and other ethnic communities in Somerville. We also focused on family networks of business owners, and the relationship of businesses to the community. Each of these themes could deserve specific attention in the future.

We present, here, a list of other possible directions for research, based on our findings.

1. The Brazilian community in Somerville
 - We were unable to give enough attention to this community because we do not speak Portuguese. If someone can speak Portuguese in the future, this would be an excellent area for research as the Brazilians are one of the largest immigrant communities in Somerville.
2. The Brazilian business community in Somerville
 - For similar reasons as mentioned above we could not explore the Brazilian business community. We do believe the Brazilian business community is bigger than the Latino community.
3. Accion Internacional
 - María Ortega is the President and CEO of this company. Based in Somerville it has national and world influence.
4. Organizing efforts in East Somerville
 - We believe the Latino business community and community in general are beginning to organize in East Somerville. Historically, this area has had a large number of immigrant groups.

5. Tony Morales

- Mr. Morales was the first Latino business owner in Somerville. He has done a lot for the community, and subsequently has become involved in politics. Along with his brothers he runs much of what occurs on Broadway.

6. East Somerville Clientele

- Who are the people who patron the shops in East Somerville? Why do they come to Somerville? Is it because they live there? Do they come from other places?

7. Where do Latinos work in Somerville?

- This is crucial to understanding the Latino economy in Somerville. We suspect some Latinos work at Tufts through OneSource, but where else do they work? Do they generally work outside of Somerville? What is it like?

8. What are the links between different immigrant groups in Somerville?

- Somerville is truly a multiethnic community. It has large immigrant populations from Brazil, Cape Verde, El Salvador, Haiti, Guatemala and other places? Is there solidarity between these groups?

9. Gender differences of business owners

- The majority of the business owners we were able to interview were women. What is the ration of male to female Latino business owners in Somerville? Did they have different motivations in starting their businesses? Were there different challenges?

10. Latino Business and the Somerville Government

- There does not appear to be a strong connection between the two. Why?

BIO – EMILY CHASAN

My name is Emily Chasan and I am a senior at Tufts University. I am a double major in International Relations and Economics. I was raised in a small suburb just outside of Philadelphia, called Bala Cynwyd and attended Lower Merion High School. Bala Cynwyd is located on the edge of Overbrook and West Philadelphia, where I have become familiar with communities on the edge of a large city, like Somerville is to Boston. I have had a long interest in anthropology and sociology, and *Urban Borderlands* is my third anthropology course at Tufts. At Tufts I am a tour guide and also an Executive Associate Editor for *The Tufts Daily*. I spent the Spring semester of 2003 studying-abroad in Madrid, Spain at the Autonomous University of Madrid through the Tufts-In-Madrid Program.

Though both my mother and father were born in the U.S., my mother's father came to the US from Panama in the 1930s. I imagine his conceptions of the U.S. were similar to some of those expressed by the Latinos I have been fortunate enough to interview and work with in Somerville.

My interest in *Urban Borderlands* stems from my Summer 2003 internship at *The Queens Courier* in Queens, New York and from my own family history. Queens is the most diverse county in the US and my experiences there this summer gave me a newfound appreciation for immigrant communities. While I was there I helped to launch *El Correo de Queens*, which was the first Spanish language newspaper to focus only on Queens. As one quarter of the borough was Hispanic or Latino, I learned much about the experiences of Latino immigrants in Jackson Heights, Elmhurst, and Corona. There, I also focused on interviewing Latino business owners.

I believe that Urban Borderlands, and courses and projects like it, are profoundly important in helping to record the history of Latinos in the U.S., and in exploring the unique experience of what being a Latino in the U.S. means.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this course and this paper, but most importantly I can not give enough thanks to the Somerville residents who were willing to give their time and share their memories with me. I would like to give a special thanks to Evelin Santos and Bianca Salazar, our high school student partners, who were absolutely wonderful. You have been invaluable to our project and I know that both of you will have successful futures. Thank you for teaching us so much about your lives and for the fun and jokes. I would like to give a special thanks to David Pistrang for being my partner in this project. I hope that together we have been able to create a glimpse into the lives of Latinos in Somerville. Lastly, to everyone in Urban Borderlands: Professor Deborah Pacini Hernandez, Rosaura Vega, Lexi, Cecilia, Joel, Lerone, and Nora, thank you for all your help and comments and hard work on your own projects that helped us to shape ours.

BIO – DAVID PISTRANG

My name is David Pistrang and I am a senior at Tufts University this year. I am majoring in International Relations with a focus in Latin America, and also getting the certificate in Peace and Justice Studies. I grew up in Amherst, Massachusetts where I took Spanish in school from the age of 12. I studied at Tufts for my freshman and sophomore years, then went abroad to Santiago, Chile for a year before returning to Tufts this fall. In addition to working hard to complete my Urban Borderlands assignments, I am the president of Shir Appeal, Tufts Only Coed Jewish A Cappella Group, and I am also a member of the Tufts Mountain Club. When I'm not hiking or singing, you can find me exploring the streets of Boston looking for new cafes and restaurants to grab a bite to eat.

Urban Borderlands has been an amazing course for me for multiple reasons. When the course first started, I was excited to be participating in a project that would allow me to speak Spanish. After coming back from Chile, I didn't want to lose the Spanish skills I had learned. I was also excited that our project was about Latino owned businesses since this meant I would get to visit all the Latino owned restaurants in Somerville. I was also excited to take a course that allowed me to get off of the Tufts campus and spend time in the city. Over the course of the semester, I drove down nearly every street in Somerville! Now that the class is nearly over, I realize that all the hard work was worth it. I learned much more in this class than I do in the average Tufts course, and got to meet several people in the Somerville community. It was also a valuable experience to work on such a large project with a partner. Emily Chasan and I both worked very hard, and I couldn't have done this project without her! Evelin Santos and Bianca Salazar were also great partners, and it was great spending time with them while getting to know Somerville. Getting to know the other members of the Urban Borderlands class was also a lot of fun. Cecilia, Lexie, Lerone, Joel and Nora: Car rides wouldn't have been the same without you. I would also like to thank Nelson Salazar and the other high school students from the Welcome Project for all their hard work. Finally, I would like to thank Professor Deborah Pacini-Hernandez and Rosaura Vega, who helped make this class happen.

BIO – EVELIN SANTOS

My name is Evelin Santos and I was born in Santa Ana, El Salvador in June 7, 1986. I am now 17 years old and I am finishing up my senior year at Somerville High School. I live in the Somerville Housing apartments on Mystic Avenue. I became interested in the project because I am Hispanic. Next year, I plan on attending nursing school in Las Vegas, Nevada.

This project was very interesting and fun. My partners David Emily and Bianca were all cooperative and fun to work with. The reason why the project was interesting is because it was based on Latino owned businesses. This is the first time people actually do such a project, which helps our community to know and learn about each other's experiences. I have learned that many of the experiences these Latinos share are very similar to those of my family. Is good for the Latino community to know that what their business provides is meaningful to other Latinos who habitat their surroundings.

BIO – BIANCA SALAZAR

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