

# CULTURAL CROSSROADS

A PUBLICATION OF THE MAYOR'S MULTICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ■ CITY OF LINCOLN, NEBRASKA ■ FALL 2006



ONE WAY TO START AN INTERESTING CONVERSATION IS TO ASK, "HOW LONG HAS YOUR FAMILY LIVED IN THE UNITED STATES?" It doesn't take long to realize that many of us are only one or two generations from "the old country." My mother was the only one in her family born in this country. Her parents and older siblings were all born in Sweden. The mother of a staff member grew up in Kansas, but spoke only German until she attended elementary school. The great-grandmother of another staff member arrived in New York from Denmark alone at age 12 on her way to the home of her married sister in Iowa.

This is a nation of immigrants. In the Midwest, it was our ancestors who risked everything to bring their families here. They brought with them their agricultural knowledge and practices that created our farm-based economy. They missed the trees from their homelands, so they planted them here. They learned many new skills, but preserved their culture and traditions and their beliefs in education and hard work. Through their diversity, they built strong communities.

Today, the U.S. is still the nation of opportunity. As a major refugee re-location center, Lincoln has welcomed the increase in our diversity. The Lincoln Public Schools does an excellent job educating students who speak more than 50 different languages. We have



Several thousand people marched from Cooper Park to the State Capitol to the federal building April 10 in support of immigration rights.

In this issue of Cultural Crossroads, members of the Mayor's Multicultural Advisory Committee (MAC) are sharing their views on the immigration issue, and they have invited other members of the community to add their thoughts. The goal is to promote understanding and to generate constructive discussion. To share your thoughts with MAC members, send an e-mail to [dgonzolas@lincoln.ne.gov](mailto:dgonzolas@lincoln.ne.gov) or fax them to 441-8653, attention: MAC.

wonderful new ethnic restaurants. We now have a Celebrate Lincoln ethnic festival to celebrate the food, music and art of new Americans from around the globe.

But the vast numbers of people who want to live here pose many challenges for this nation. The issue of immigration reform has captured the attention of the nation as state and federal legislation is proposed to deal with those challenges.

Immigration is a complex issue involving economics, education, health care, civil rights, religion, security and law enforcement. As we examine this emotional issue, we need to keep in mind the bravery of our ancestors and the accomplishments immigrants have made in building our communities, states and nation. We need to keep in mind that new immigrants also have an enormous potential to contribute much to our collective future.

There are no easy answers to the questions being posed on immigration reform. Our goal must be a system that respects the law while providing dignity, compassion and respect for all. We owe it to those who came before us and to those who will come in the future.

# THE IMMIGRATION DEBATE

## Marty Ramirez, MAC member

While recognizing the right of a sovereign nation to control its borders, we need to recognize the reality of immigration and immigration as the sign of the times. America is a continent born of immigrant peoples who came to inhabit these lands and who from north to south gave birth to our modern day societies. Regardless of their legal status, immigrants like all other persons, possess inherent human dignity that should be respected. Immigrants without documentation should not be treated as criminals and subjected to persecution.

The treatment of immigrants challenges the conscience of elected officials, policy makers and enforcement officers. We should continue to advocate for immigration reform that is just and fair to immigrants.

## Dr. Joel Gajardo, MAC member On Fences.

A fence is a symbol of separation. A fence creates a clear distinction and distance between us and them, between the ins and outs, between those who belong and those who do not. The Berlin Wall separated two different socio-economic systems: capitalism and communism. The fence between the United States and Mexico - if ever built - will separate two different outcomes of the same socio-economic system: capitalism. In one place we have unemployment and stagnation, in the other, opportunities and progress. Under this system, money can travel back and forth freely, but people are not free to do the same. As long as we have the need for fences in our world, they will be a constant reminder of our inability to establish a global system with opportunities, justice and equality for all.

## Don Walton, *Lincoln Journal Star*

The Senate and House appear to be on a collision course in a battle fraught with political peril. Ultimately, control will go to partisans seeking advantage – or at least protection – in a volatile election year.

With control of Congress at stake in this autumn's elections, immigration has emerged as the hottest-button issue.

Reasonable voices on both sides of the divide may be drowned out by the shouters.

The rhetoric often is ugly, divisive and damaging to the image of a nation whose strength was built with open arms.

Too much of the argument already has spun off beyond how to best deal with the problem of illegal immigration into xenophobia.

We'll find out a lot about ourselves, and each other, before this one's over.



## Amrita Mahapatra, MAC member

Illegal immigration is a multifaceted issue. How you understand it depends on which side you are on. Some see it as an invasion of the country and illegal usage of badly needed resources. Others see it as an easy and speedy entry into land of opportunity. Many businesses see it as a convenient and sometimes essential channel to get manpower. The newcomers see it as an opportunity to participate in the American experience. The employers see it as a way to get cheap labor, and consumers know it to be the reason for goods being sold at reasonable cost. Too many people on both sides benefit from this. The border between America and Mexico has been intentionally kept porous sometimes with the blessing of this country and other times with an intentional “looking the other way” policy to allow these benefits to continue.

In today's post 9-11 world we are faced with an elusive danger. The porous border poses a grave breach of security. It needs to be sealed and controlled. Every country has a right to enforce its laws. America has conveniently looked away (for personal benefit) from enforcing its immigration laws for quite some time. Now we need to tighten the policy. Let us be generous with the immigrants already here, for it is not just they who have benefitted from a lax enforcement, but all of us too. Illegal immigration exists because until now, both parties benefitted from it. Its solution, therefore, lies not in strict and restrictive laws, but in bilateral dialogue leading to a mutually beneficial policy that both parties will have incentive to obey.



## Dick Herman

Herman worked for the Lincoln Journal Star for more than 35 years before retiring in 1993. The following is taken from a column written in April for *Nebraska StatePaper.com*. The column begins with Herman remembering a Nebraska panhandle tornado in the early 1950s.

Back in the *Scottsbluff Star Herald* newsroom, I learned of the destruction of a small outbuilding. It had been home for at least a dozen or more Mexican laborers. Gosh, I protested to one of the family members who owned the morning daily, we ought to get those men decent, permanent housing. The boss blew off my suggestion. I certainly did not understand, he told me, the agricultural arrangement by which the Mexicans were imported to labor in Nebraska.

In that instant episode can be traced the deep roots of problems chronically faced by North Americans and Mexicans, legal and otherwise.

Fact A: North American business people want the cheapest possible labor costs.

Fact B: If that requires exploiting alien workers, well isn't that the traditional system, the American way, supposedly a beneficial bargain on both sides?

Just now, Congress has been jolted seeing tens of thousands of Hispanics marching in urban streets for the rights of illegals. Many carried Mexican flags. Our red, white and blue pride suddenly seemed under a non-terrorist attack. Yet, this was an "invasion" that could have been shunted off long ago.

Perhaps 30 years back, syndicated newspaper columnist Georgia Ann Geyer regularly hammered on the need to tighten the nation's porous southern border.

Simultaneously, Robert Nelson, a gifted *Lincoln Journal* editorialist, rationally pointed out that helping Mexico develop its own economic options was a better deal in the long run for the United States than allowing immigrants to flood north. Alas, there wasn't much of a listening audience for that wisdom.

To be sure, North Americans never were resolutely fixed on the border problem. If they'd really been serious, two national steps, in combination, always were mandatory.

The first: a federal minimum wage law touching all bases and regularly escalating its top dollar level. That would have appealed to home-grown workers.

The second, and even more important, getting very tough on the conduct of employers who hired illegal immigrants. Rather than loading up the luckless Hispanics, busing them back south from Nebraska's LB775 meat-packing plants and elsewhere, it should have been the employers who were penalized. Put business types in jail, coast to coast, and everybody will get the desired idea: firm borders carrying a clear meaning.

## Carmela Sánchez de Jiménez, CEO, El Centro de las Américas Immigration Policy and Diminution of the American Family

The people of Lincoln are rightfully proud of our reputation for generosity of spirit, our welcoming nature of persons from around the world, and our beliefs in justice and equality for all. Today, however, we, like the rest of the nation, are gripped in a moral crisis of near overwhelming proportion. We are gripped with the questions of who shall be welcomed among us, and who shall not. I am discussing, of course, the immigration question in general, but more particularly, the question of undocumented aliens. How we resolve these questions will have profound implications about the kind of people we are and the kind of nation we risk becoming.

Certainly, we are not the first people to have been faced with this issue. Indeed, it is an ancient question. Moses, for example, tells us in Leviticus 19:33-34: "When an alien dwells among you in your land, you shall not molest him. You shall treat the alien who resides among you no differently than the natives born among you; and you shall have for him the same love as you have for yourself." No right-thinking person can disagree with this biblical admonition; but in the over-heated atmosphere that surrounds this controversy, some politicians are using this issue to divide us one from another, and in truth, to divide us even from our own sensibilities.

Some politicians seem to suggest that all of the problems facing the U.S. could be remedied by the simple expedient of expelling from our borders 12 million, hard-working, honest immigrants who have come here over the past several decades, seeking a better life for themselves and their families, and in the doing of it, have contributed immeasurably to the benefit of our economy and of our society. In order to make us think poorly of these aliens, politicians call them "illegals." But what would we think of them if we call them what they are – fathers, mothers, grandparents who come from countries with no opportunities to provide even the most meager form of support for their families? Might we take a kinder and gentler approach?

Moreover, what of the fathers and mothers who have children born in the U.S. Contrary to recent inflammatory language, there is no such thing as an anchor baby. That is to say, merely having children born in the U.S. (who are, therefore, U.S. citizens) does not prevent the parents from being deported. When the parents are deported, these U.S. citizen children are left with few options, none of which we would wish to befall our own children.

Their choices, really, are two: they can be forced into foster care, or they can leave with their parents, a situation which amounts to being sent into exile. If they go into foster care, the law provides that if they have no contact with their parents for one year (and how could they?), then the parental rights will be terminated, and the children will be put up for adoption. If, however, they go into exile with their deported parents, then they will lose all of their rights as citizens to live in the U.S., to be educated here, and to gain from the opportunities that are uniquely American, and that we all claim as the birth right of every American citizen.

Being a U.S. citizen is a precious blessing which none of us would lightly abandon. If we begin down the path of depriving some citizens of their birth rights, what will prevent others from depriving us of ours?

We are, once again, at a pivotal moment in our history. How we resolve the plight of the immigrants may well determine the type of nation we become; and it may not be the just nation we would hope for. This is a time for thoughtful consideration. It is no time to be led around by inflammatory language.

# NO PLACE FOR HATE

## RALLY

SEPTEMBER 10, 2006  
LINCOLN High School



Kaz Tada and Susan Scott were interviewed by local television stations. Tada was a World War II Japanese American internee and is an alumnus of Nebraska Wesleyan. Scott is one of the organizers of the event.



The crowd gave Tada a standing ovation for his remarks. Other speakers included Mayor Seng; Lt. Governor Rick Sheehy; John Heineman, head of the international baccalaureate program for LPS; Police Chief Tom Casady; Annie Stokes of the Lincoln NAACP; and Phuong Dinh, who immigrated from Vietnam when he was 8, graduated from North Star High School and now attends Southeast Community College.



Many organizations sponsored information tables and children's activities.

Kaz Tada read the following poem as part of his remarks.

### **"Preserving Truth"**

by Tracy Jan Oshita

*(With love and respect, I dedicate this poem to Hosen and Sue Oshita)*

Who will carry the torch for them?  
The years have come and gone;  
The wishes of many to remember the days,  
The events, the embarrassment, the wrong.

For those few still out there listening,  
The story shall never go untold;  
It was the lives of the Japanese Americans,  
A period lived defiantly by the bold.

Many were young and many were old,  
They were "Americans" full of pride;  
But in the government's infinite wisdom,  
They were considered part of the "other" side.

It was barracks, soldiers and machine guns,  
That surrounded their very existence;  
Though prisoners of war and of the times,  
They lived with dignity and perseverance.

Let us never forget those times,  
They created both history and tolerance;

We should never again have to witness the  
crime, Of a government's most  
impetuous ignorance.

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Members of the Executive Steel Band are Hurricane Katrina survivors who now live in Lincoln.



## Chief Standing Bear COMMEMORATION

Traditional Native American dancers were featured during the second annual Chief Standing Bear Commemoration Celebration May 12 at the State Capitol. The Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs hosted the mid-day event and a breakfast to honor the Ponca leader whose trial on May 12, 1879 led to the landmark decision to consider Natives as people.

## 27th Annual Juneteenth Celebration

More than 3,000 people of all ages enjoyed the annual Juneteenth Celebration June 17 at the Clyde Malone Community Center and Trago Park. The event included food, a carnival, live entertainment and a health and human service resources fair.



## “Stories of Home”



Stories of Home Artistic Director, Pepon Osorio of Philadelphia, far right, visits with, from left, Lela Knox Shanks and artist Ann Gradwohl at an exhibit at UNL's Architecture Hall. Ann created a sculpture based on Lela's experiences.

The Lincoln Arts Council's Stories of Home public art project uses sculpture to tell the stories of 12 Lincoln families. It wraps up in March 2007 with an auction. For more information, see the LAC Web site at [www.artscene.org](http://www.artscene.org). The Web site also includes information on the New Americans Folk and Traditional Arts Project.



## Celebrate Lincoln Draws 30,000 to Downtown Lincoln

The third annual Celebrate Lincoln Ethnic Festival June 9 through 11 featured a colorful Parade of Nations. The event is presented by Updowntowners Inc. and features music, food, crafts and games. The 2007 event is set for June 22 and 23, and vendor and merchant applications are now being accepted. For more information, contact Tina at 434-6902.

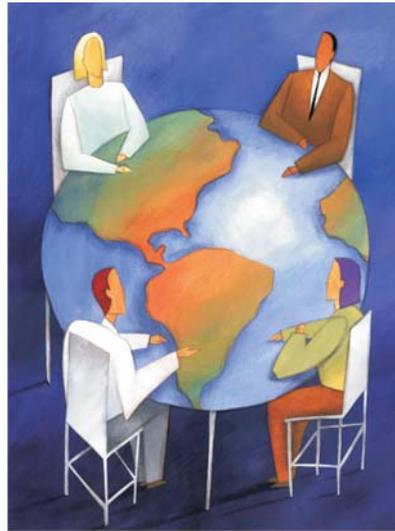


# 2006 Fair Housing Conference

## Another Success for LCHR

Nearly 300 people from across the state attended the 2006 Fair Housing Conference April 17 and 18. The Lincoln Commission on Human Rights (LCHR) hosted its first conference in 2002 to provide affordable training for housing providers and advocates. This year's conference addressed concerns about potential mortgage lending and home insurance discrimination. It included specific fair housing training for mortgage lenders, home insurance agents and realtors. Instructors included Shanna Smith, Director of the National Fair Housing Alliance; Steve Virgil from the Creighton Law Center; and Gary Fischer, an attorney with the Fair Housing Center of Nebraska. John Relman from Washington D.C. presented Fair Housing Law updates. Other topics included the geography of residential segregation; remedies and damages in fair housing; issues faced by clients; and a success story from Harvard, Nebraska. HUD staff from Omaha and Kansas City answered questions and helped with an interactive session on specific discrimination cases.

The 2007 Fair Housing Conference is set for April 30 and May 1 at the Embassy Suites Hotel. For more information on this and other events sponsored by the LCHR, contact Larry Williams, Director, at 441-8691.



# Have a COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

The Community Outreach Partnership Center at UNL is sponsoring a Community Conversation Saturday, October 14, with a focus on recent immigrants and refugees in Lincoln. The event is from 8 a.m. to noon at Clinton Elementary School, 1520 North 29th Street. The entire event, including child care, food and entertainment, is free. The purpose of the event is to create a better understanding about Lincoln's recent immigrants and refugees and to begin to identify strategies and tools to help newcomers overcome the challenges they face. To register, call 472-0597.

## 2006 FREEDOM FUND BANQUET "CELEBRATING DIVERSITY... DEFENDING OUR FREEDOM"

The NAACP Lincoln Branch is accepting reservations through October 14 for its Freedom Fund Banquet November 11 at the Cornhusker Marriott. The event begins with a social at 5:30 p.m. and will feature remarks by Brigadier General Julia J. Cleckley (ret.), the first female line officer to be promoted to Brigadier General in the Army National Guard. General Cleckley also is a recipient of the NAACP Roy Wilkins Renowned Service Award. The banquet raises funds to provide educational scholarships to graduating high schoolers who will attend post-secondary institutions. Tickets are \$35 for adults and \$22 for students through 12th grade. Reservations may be sent to NAACP Lincoln Branch, PO Box 81322, Lincoln, NE 68501-1322. For more information, contact Leroy Stokes (488-2100) or Jereldine Mays (488-0853).

# WELCOME, Refugees and Immigrants!

The Lincoln Action Program's Center for Refugees and Immigrants (CRI) helps to make the process of becoming a U.S. citizen easier for new Americans. The CRI offers services in Arabic, Spanish, Bosnian and English. Those services include assistance in filling out citizenship applications, studying for citizenship tests, applying for green cards, getting travel documents and completing paper work for sponsoring family members. CRI also helps refugees and immigrants with finding employment and health care and dealing with bills and budgets. For more information, contact the CRI program administrator Cher Omerovic at 471-4515 or see the LAP Web site at [www.lincoln-action.org](http://www.lincoln-action.org).

**VOTE!** General election day is Tuesday, November 7. The deadline for in-person voter registration is 6 p.m. October 27. For more information, visit the Election Commission Web site at [lincoln.ne.gov](http://lincoln.ne.gov) (keyword: election).



# Congratulations To...

El Centro de las Américas (formerly the Hispanic Center) on its name, its new location at 2615 "O" Street and its new Web site, [www.elcentrodelasamericas.org](http://www.elcentrodelasamericas.org). Its new logo will be unveiled at "Festival de las Américas," the Hispanic Heritage Month Festival October 8 in Antelope Park.

Milo Mumgaard, Director of the Nebraska Appleseed Center, who has been selected to lead a national effort to improve the integration of immigrants.

The Linh Quang Buddhist Center, which broke ground May 13 for a new Vietnamese Buddhist temple at S.W. 33rd Street and West Pleasant Hill Road. The Center was established in 1993 at 216 West "F" Street, its current Worship Hall.

The Lincoln Asian Community and Cultural Center for receiving a \$117,580 grant to help refugee families from the federal Ethnic Community Self Help Grant Program.

MAC member Marty Ramirez, the first recipient of the "Closing the Gap" Award from the Community Health Endowment (CHE). The award was presented at CHE's annual meeting in June and recognizes a person or program for significant contributions toward addressing health disparities in our community.

The YWCA's Tribute to Women honores: Carol Connor, Deb Daily, Chris Funk, Carmela Sánchez de Jiménez and Annie Stokes. They will be honored at a luncheon on Friday, October 27. This year's Chrysalis Award recipient is Amal Hamden, and the Gladys Forsyth Award Recipient is Southeast Community College. For more information, visit [www.ywcalincoln.org](http://www.ywcalincoln.org).

The 271 African-American students recognized for their educational achievement in May by the Lincoln Chapter of the NAACP. Scholarship winners are Daisy Zhang, Alexandria Shasteen, Eyob Tesfalem Meles, Ashton Combs, Trisden Williams, Karen Huggins and Malcolm Wade. Educator Service Awards were presented to Adeline Mickens and Charles Bowling II.

Judi M. gaiashkibos, Executive Director of the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs, who was elected president of the Governor's Interstate Indian Council, whose mission is to promote cooperation between State and Tribal governments.

## FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Diwali, the Indian Festival of Lights, will be celebrated with dinner and entertainment beginning at 5:30 p.m., Sunday, November 12 in the Great Room at the UNL East Campus Union. For more information, call 423-5568.

## NOMINATIONS SOUGHT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AWARD

The Lincoln Commission on Human Rights (LCHR) is now accepting nominations for the 2006 Gerald Henderson Human Rights Award. The award was established in 2000 to recognize outstanding achievements in furthering human relations in the City of Lincoln. In 2003, the award was renamed to honor and remember Mr. Henderson, first director of the LCHR and a long-time civil rights activist.

Nominees will be judged on their achievements in improving human rights based on activities implemented, services performed or programs operated in the City of Lincoln. **Nominations are due no later than Friday, October 20.**

The 2006 award will be presented by Mayor Seng at 4 p.m. Tuesday, November 21, in the Mayor's Conference Room, second floor of the County-City Building, 555 South 10th Street. Nomination forms are available by calling the Commission at 441-7624, 441-8398 (TDD), or sending an e-mail to [lwilliams@lincoln.ne.gov](mailto:lwilliams@lincoln.ne.gov).

Previous winners have been Dan Williams; Cecilia Olivarez Huerta; José Soto and the Division of Affirmative Action, Equity and Diversity at Southeast Community College; Milo Mumgaard and the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest, Inc.; and Judi M. gaiashkibos.

## Moody Smith Leaves LCHR

Sandi Moody Smith, who worked for the Lincoln Commission on Human Rights from May 1999 through July 2006, was married in July and now lives in Missouri with her husband, Jimmi Smith. Below is a portion of a letter to the editor written by Sandi and published in the *Lincoln Journal Star* July 16, 2006. The letter challenged Lincoln residents to explore the cultural diversity of the community. It is reprinted with permission of Sandi and the newspaper.

### Explore Lincoln

"Step out of your comfort zone at least once a month and visit a church, or restaurant, or store right here in Lincoln that you would not normally visit. Find out for yourself that Lincoln is a multicultural city.

As I prepare to move to another city and find more treasures, I implore all residents of Lincoln, of all colors, of all religions, of all nationalities, to please open your hearts and minds to people outside of your own comfort zone. And wherever you go, let others know that Lincoln is a beautiful city made up of a kaleidoscope of people and that all people are truly welcome here."

# MAYOR'S MULTICULTURAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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**Mayor Coleen J. Seng's Office**  
441-7511

*Designed by Citizen Information Center*

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The mission of the Mayor's Multicultural Advisory Committee is to identify and recommend policies and strategies that enhance and support the full and equal partnership of people of diverse racial, cultural, economic, gender and disabled communities in city government and Lincoln community affairs.

## **Editorial Policy**

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This is a publication of the Mayor's Multicultural Advisory Committee of the City of Lincoln. Material appearing in this publication shall be in accordance with the purpose, goals and official positions of the committee.

Submissions by community groups and individuals are welcome and will be considered for publication based on the following criteria: the article's compliance with the goals and official positions of the committee; the article's relevancy to the designated theme of that quarter's newsletter; and the length of the article. Articles may be accepted as written, edited or declined for publication.

Responsibility for final decisions lies with the committee chair and newsletter editors. Inquiries about this publication may be directed to the Chair of the Mayor's Multicultural Committee, Amir Azimi.

## **ATTEND A MAC MEETING**

The Mayor's Multicultural Advisory Committee meets from 3:30 to 5 p.m. the second Tuesday of every month. Meeting times and dates may change, so members of the public who would like to attend should confirm the time and date with the Mayor's Office at 441-7511. Meetings are normally held in the Mayor's Conference Room, 555 South 10th Street, and free parking is available in the lot north of the building.