

TIMES-CALL LOCAL BUSINESS

Longmont hosts Latino Chamber's annual expo

City officials stress reaching out to Latino businesses

By Tony Kindelspire Longmont Times-Call, 10/17/2013



Rita Liu and George Liu talk with Donna Lovato with The Inn Between, during the Ninth Annual Boulder County Multicultural Business Resource Expo on Thursday at the Plaza Convention Center. (LEWIS GEYER)



Stan Havlick, left, with Eldorado Natural Springs Water, talks with Alvie Pena, with Transaction Resources, during the Ninth Annual Boulder County Multicultural Business Resource Expo on Thursday at the Plaza Convention Center. (LEWIS GEYER)

LONGMONT -- The city of Longmont is making a conscious effort to reach out to all the businesses in the city, large and small, and it could use the help of the Latino Chamber of Commerce of Boulder County in accomplishing that, according to Longmont City Manager Harold Dominguez.

"We're trying to reach out to all businesses," Dominguez told an audience of about three dozen people at the Ninth Annual Multicultural Business Resource Expo on Thursday. "What are you going through? What are you dealing with? What do you need?"

He said the city was especially eager to help Latino businesses that suffered flood damage. The Latino Chamber can "help to make sure we don't miss anybody," he said.

Dominguez also said he believes a diverse economy is critical to Longmont's economy. "The more diverse you are as a community the more you are able to overcome the challenges like we've had in the past month," Dominguez said.

Assistant city manager Shawn Lewis, also invited to speak at the expo, said he hopes to see more diversity in Longmont in the form of more Latino-owned businesses. He said that although about 25 percent of the city's population is estimated to be Latino, only about 6 percent of the businesses are Latino-owned.

Lewis outlined some of the programs the city offers that are available to help existing and startup businesses, including the city's economic gardening initiative and its startup and business improvement grants. The city also specifically is reaching out to Latino-owned businesses through its business outreach program, and it already has helped some of them get training or grant money.

Jesse Esparza, board president of the Latino Chamber, told the relatively small morning crowd that the chamber is undergoing a period of reorganization in hopes of growing its membership. The Latino Chamber has about 40 members right now, he said.

Another aspect of the refocus is to try to build better bridges between the Latino and Anglo businesses in Boulder County, Esparza said. "This is part of business, and we know that when the networking starts it can really jump-start a business -- on both sides," he said.