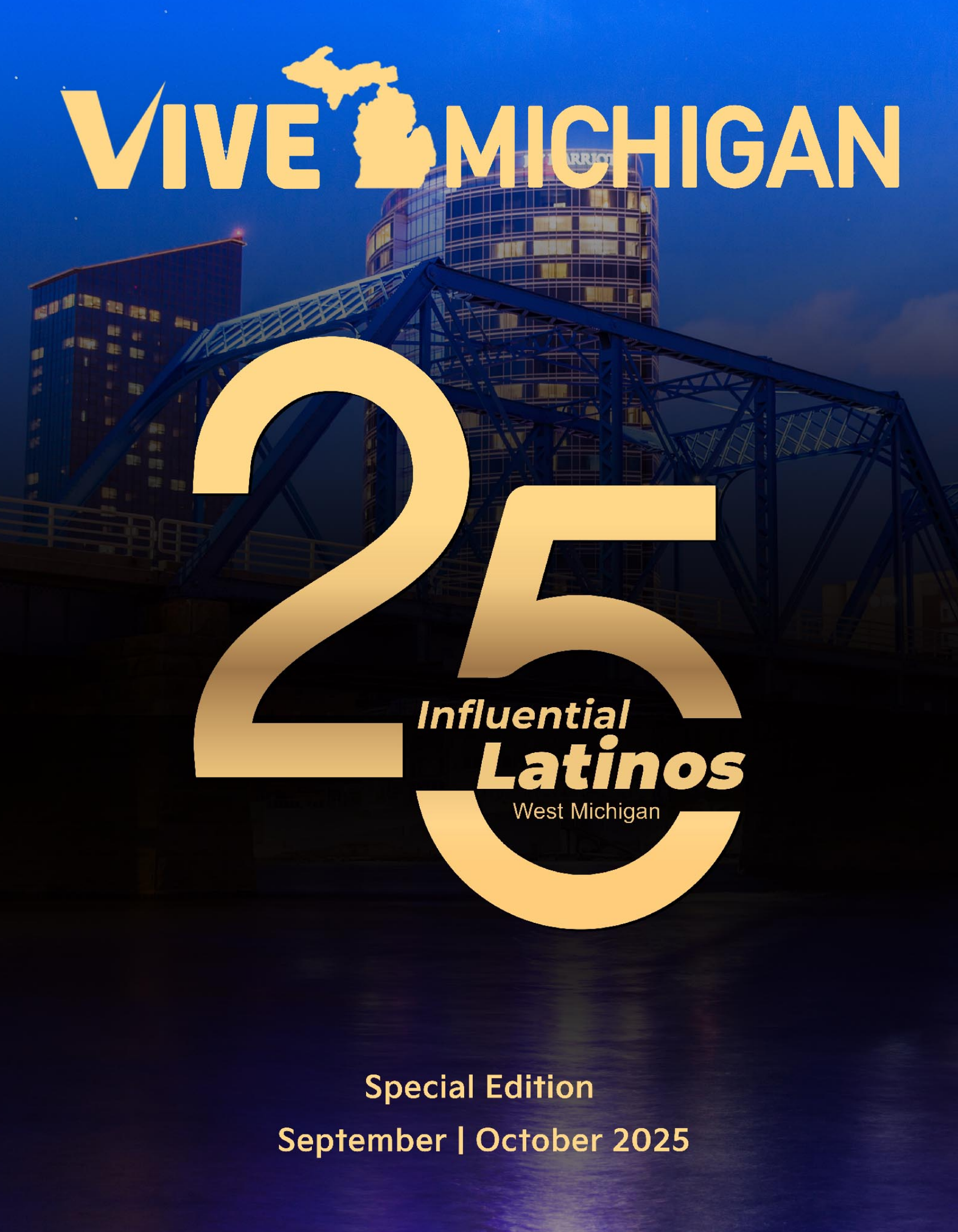


The background of the entire page is a photograph of a city skyline at night. In the foreground, a large steel truss bridge spans across the frame. Behind the bridge, several tall buildings are visible, including a prominent cylindrical skyscraper with many lit windows. The sky is a deep blue with some light clouds. The overall lighting is dark, with the city lights providing the main illumination.

VIVE MICHIGAN

25

Influential
Latinos
West Michigan

Special Edition
September | October 2025

Upcoming Events



The Entrepreneurs Summit is designed to help you understand entrepreneurship in its entirety and avoid common mistakes, gather practical and objective information, expert advice and guidance, accelerate your growth and achieve your business goals, explore emerging trends, accelerate learning and guide short-term decisions. The event will take place on **November 10, 2025**.



The Latina conference is a new event focused on Building on this legacy, we are proud to introduce the West Michigan Latina Conference. This conference is designed to focus specifically on Latinas, offering a curated agenda that addresses both the professional and personal growth needs of this vibrant demographic. The event will take place on **March 2026**. It is the month in which we celebrate women.



The LatinNext Summit is an event focused on professional development for our growing Latino Community. The summit will include two tracks, one for young Latino professionals early in their career and the second one focused on Latinos who are established in their career and looking to grow as leaders. The event will take place on **May 2026**.



Our 25 Most Influential Latinos in West Michigan is coming back this fall. **September 25th, 2026**. We will be recognizing some of our West Michigan Latinos who are making an impact in our community. The celebration will take place during Hispanic Heritage Month.

Bienvenidos!

El destino principal de
entretenimiento del oeste de Michigan!



ACRISURE
AMPHITHEATER™



DEVOS PERFORMANCE HALL



DEVOS PLACE



VAN ANDEL ARENA



GRAND RAPIDS-KENT COUNTY

CONVENTION / ARENA AUTHORITY
COMMUNITY INCLUSION GROUP



Where mindfulness and business meet.

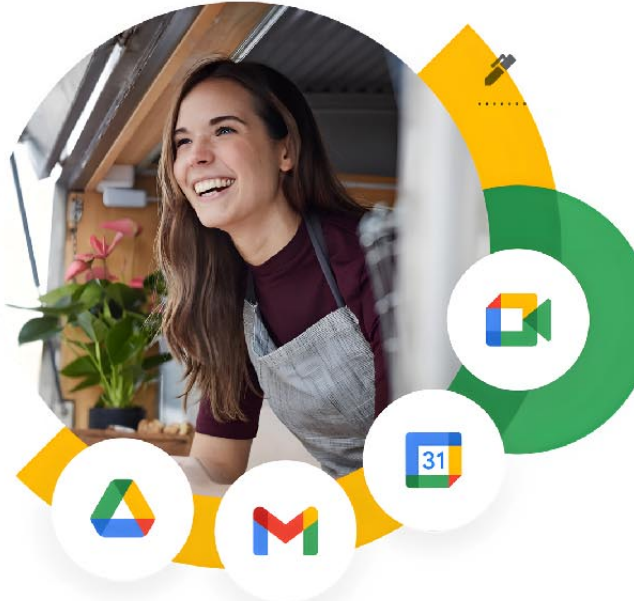
Work, fun, and relaxation don't always go together, but we've made finding that balance a priority. Our team is committed to your success with 15,756 square-feet of private meeting rooms, on-site catering, and high-quality audiovisual resources. Then, end your day with our world-class restaurant and guest rooms that ensure a restorative night's sleep.



JW Marriott Grand Rapids
jwgrinfo@ahchospitality.com | 616.242.1500
235 Louis Campau St. Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

Unleash your team's productivity.

Grow and run your business more efficiently.



Professional
Memails
 come from
 professional
 addresses.



Go from buttercupbakery27@gmail.com
 to sales@buttercupbakery.com

Try it free



SCAN ME



M&I INTERIORS

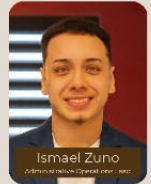
CRAFTING SPACES WITH EXCELLENCE



A Better Future, For All

Founded in 2019, M & I Interiors is a Latino and Women-Owned construction company committed to delivering quality, reliable work while championing diversity, equity, and collaboration in Michigan's construction industry.

Meet the M & I Interiors team—bridging the gap between customer service and construction in West Michigan.



Our Trades

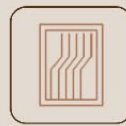
Residential

Drywall Finish
 Painting

Commercial

Interior Framing
 Drywall Finishing
 Painting

Honorary Trades



Interior
 Framing



Insulation



A/C



Sandblasting



Fireproofing
 & Remodeling

Bringing Color and Character to Every Corner of Your Home

Let's transform your space with a finish you'll love—inside and out.

CONTACT US NOW



+16162719201



office@mi-interiorsllc.com



www.mi-interiorsllc.com



M & I Interiors LLC



@interiors_llc



West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



Eunice Lopez-Martin

México



Has been a dedicated leader and mentor within the West Michigan Latino community. In 2022, she co-founded Steelcase's Hispanic Business Resource Group, La Mesa, to create a supportive space where Latino employees can develop professionally, celebrate their culture, and connect with the wider community. This group has become a vital platform for fostering Latino representation and inclusion in the corporate world.

Beyond her corporate role, Eunice is passionate about mentorship. As an Adjunct Professor at Grand Valley State University, she guides Hispanic students through career development and helps them gain confidence in navigating professional environments. Many of her mentees have secured internships and jobs

in industries where Latinos are traditionally underrepresented.

Eunice also serves as President of the Grand Rapids Rotary Club, where she champions programs focused on education, inclusion, and service, ensuring Latino voices are part of important civic conversations. Her leadership emphasizes creating opportunities for Latino youth and fostering economic empowerment.

Her journey began with her immigrant parents, whose sacrifices inspired her resilience and pride. Overcoming barriers in corporate America, Eunice earned an MBA and has committed herself to opening doors for others. Through mentorship, advocacy, and leadership, she continues to inspire and empower the next generation of Latino leaders in West Michigan.

Es una líder y mentora comprometida con la comunidad latina de West Michigan. En 2022, cofundó La Mesa, el Grupo de Recursos para Negocios Hispanos de Steelcase, con el propósito de crear un espacio donde los empleados latinos puedan desarrollarse profesionalmente, celebrar su cultura y conectarse con la comunidad. Este grupo se ha convertido en una plataforma clave para fomentar la representación y la inclusión latina en el mundo corporativo.

Además de su rol en la empresa, Eunice se dedica con pasión a la mentoría. Como profesora adjunta en la Universidad Estatal de Grand Valley, guía a estudiantes latinos en su desarrollo profesional, ayudándolos a ganar confianza para enfrentar ambientes laborales donde a menudo son subrepresentados. Muchos de sus estudiantes han conseguido pasantías y empleos en indus-

trias donde los latinos no están tan presentes.

Eunice también es presidenta del Club Rotario de Grand Rapids, donde impulsa programas enfocados en la educación, la inclusión y el servicio, asegurando que las voces latinas formen parte de las conversaciones cívicas importantes. Su liderazgo busca crear oportunidades para la juventud latina y promover el empoderamiento económico.

Su historia comienza con sus padres inmigrantes, cuyo sacrificio le inspiró resiliencia y orgullo. Tras superar obstáculos, obtuvo un MBA y se dedica a abrir puertas para otros. A través de la mentoría, defensa y liderazgo, sigue inspirando y empoderando a la próxima generación de líderes latinos en West Michigan.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Dr. Gerson Moreno-Riaño

Championing Education and Opportunity for
West Michigan's Latino Community
Colombia



Dr. Gerson Moreno-Riaño, President of Cornerstone University, has emerged as a strong advocate for the Latino community in West Michigan. A Colombian immigrant who arrived in the U.S. at age nine, he embodies the immigrant story of perseverance, education, and service.

Under his leadership, Cornerstone has deepened its connection with the Hispanic community through strategic partnerships and inclusive initiatives.

Notably, he helped launch the SOAR program, a mobile-delivered business degree that now serves Hispanic Chamber of Commerce members with scholarships and access to higher education. He's also supported the Urban Church Leadership Center, offering resources to dozens of Latino churches over six

years.

Moreno-Riaño regularly invites Hispanic pastors to speak at chapel services and personally translates their messages—bridging cultures within the university.

Nationally, he's elevated Latino voices by welcoming leaders like Rev. Samuel Rodriguez and CHLI's Mary Ann Gomez Orta to campus events, and by representing West Michigan in Washington, D.C. Thanks to his leadership, Hispanic enrollment at Cornerstone's School of Business has doubled.

Through vision and lived experience, Dr. Moreno-Riaño is transforming higher education access for Latinos—proving that when we invest in community, everyone rises.

El Dr. Gerson Moreno-Riaño, presidente de Cornerstone University, se ha convertido en un firme defensor de la comunidad latina en West Michigan. Inmigrante colombiano que llegó a EE. UU. a los nueve años, representa la historia de perseverancia, educación y servicio que caracteriza a muchos latinos.

Bajo su liderazgo, Cornerstone ha fortalecido sus lazos con la comunidad hispana mediante alianzas estratégicas e iniciativas inclusivas. Destaca la creación del programa SOAR, una licen-

ciatura móvil en negocios que ofrece becas a miembros de la Cámara Hispana de Comercio y sus familias.

Durante más de seis años, Cornerstone ha proporcionado oficinas y recursos al Urban Church Leadership Center, beneficiando a decenas de iglesias latinas y sus líderes.

Además, el Dr. Moreno-Riaño invita frecuentemente a pastores hispanos a hablar en los servicios de capilla de la universidad, ofreciendo traducción simultánea para acercar culturas.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Eva Aguirre Cooper

México



Has been a powerful voice for the Latino community in West Michigan for over three decades. Born in Detroit to immigrant parents from Jalisco, Mexico, Eva grew up embracing her cultural roots and community values. Her journey in media began at WGVU, where she produced Spanish-language programs highlighting Latino stories. Later, as Community Affairs Director at WOOD TV, Eva used her role to connect media resources with underserved populations, leading numerous initiatives such as disaster relief efforts, literacy programs, and food pantry support.

Eva's work has always been driven by a deep commitment to giving a voice to the voiceless. She fondly recalls interviewing

Cesar Chavez, who inspired her with the message, "Racism is like a cancer that continues to grow if untreated." Through events, school visits, and public speaking, Eva has consistently encouraged young Latino students to pursue their dreams, emphasizing the importance of representation.

Her leadership extended beyond the media, volunteering on countless boards and committees, and receiving a regional Emmy for her impactful work. Eva continues to serve the community with passion, recently completing a solo 500-mile pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago. Her story is one of dedication, resilience, and the power of using media to uplift and unite communities.

Ha sido una voz poderosa para la comunidad latina en West Michigan por más de tres décadas. Nacida en Detroit de padres inmigrantes de Jalisco, México, Eva creció valorando sus raíces culturales y el compromiso con la comunidad. Su carrera en medios comenzó en WGVU, donde produjo programas en español que destacan historias latinas. Más tarde, como Directora de Asuntos Comunitarios en WOOD TV, Eva usó su rol para conectar recursos mediáticos con poblaciones vulnerables, liderando iniciativas como ayuda en desastres, programas de alfabetización y apoyo a despensas de alimentos.

El trabajo de Eva siempre ha estado motivado por su compro-

miso de dar voz a los que no la tienen. Recuerda con cariño su entrevista a César Chávez, quien la inspiró con la frase: "El racismo es como un cáncer que sigue creciendo si no se trata." A través de eventos, visitas escolares y charlas públicas, Eva ha animado a jóvenes latinos a perseguir sus sueños y ha resaltado la importancia de la representación.

Su liderazgo va más allá de los medios, con voluntariado en numerosas juntas y comités, y un premio Emmy regional por su trabajo. Eva sigue sirviendo a la comunidad con pasión, recientemente completando una peregrinación de 500 millas en el Camino de Santiago. Su historia es un ejemplo de dedicación, resiliencia y el poder de los medios para unir y elevar comunidades.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Arthur Betancourt

Empowering West Michigan's Latino Community
Through Leadership and Opportunity

México



Art Betancourt, founder of AEBetancourt, is a powerful example of resilience and purpose-driven leadership. From humble beginnings, Art overcame countless barriers to build one of North America's fastest-growing recruiting firms—all while staying committed to uplifting West Michigan's Latino community.

Through mentorship programs like LatinNext's Emerging Leaders, and board service at San Juan Diego Academy, Art actively invests in Latino talent and education. Internally, AEBetancourt celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month with local Latino-owned businesses and provides cultural education to its team.

Their DEI initiatives and "Force for Good" program further support businesses like Tamales Mary, Pupusería El Salvador, and

Supermercado México.

Art's leadership also extends to empowering his employees. With plans to grow from 50 to 140 team members by 2027, AEBetancourt continues creating economic opportunity in the region. Art's personal story—from a struggling student to the youngest partner at an M&A firm—resonates deeply with aspiring leaders who feel like outsiders.

His mission is clear: build lasting impact through integrity, courage, and connection. As Art says, "Getting to the moon wasn't the hard part—it was everything it took to get there." That spirit now guides his work: opening doors for others and proving that greatness comes from rising together.

Art Betancourt, fundador de AEBetancourt, es un claro ejemplo de resiliencia y liderazgo con propósito. Desde sus inicios humildes, superó numerosos obstáculos para crear una de las firmas de reclutamiento de más rápido crecimiento en América del Norte, todo mientras mantenía su compromiso con la comunidad latina de West Michigan.

A través de programas de mentoría como LatinNext's Emerging Leaders y su participación en la junta de San Juan Diego Academy, Art invierte activamente en el talento y la educación latina. Dentro de su empresa, celebra el Mes de la Herencia Hispana con comidas de negocios latinos locales y contenido cultu-

ral. Sus iniciativas de DEI y el programa "Force for Good" apoyan a empresas como Tamales Mary, Pupusería El Salvador y Supermercado México.

Como empleador, apuesta por el crecimiento profesional. AEBetancourt planea expandirse de 50 a 140 empleados para 2027, generando oportunidades económicas reales. La historia personal de Art—de casi abandonar la escuela a convertirse en el socio más joven de una firma de fusiones—es inspiración para muchos. Su misión es clara: crear impacto duradero con integridad, valentía y conexión. Como él dice: "Llegar a la luna no fue lo difícil, fue todo lo que se necesitó para lograrlo." Ese espíritu ahora guía su misión de abrir puertas para los demás.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Monica Steimle-App

Dominican Republic



Has been a passionate advocate for the West Michigan Latino community throughout her career. Rising to the position of Senior Vice President at Rockford, Monica has balanced professional success with deep community involvement. She has served on multiple boards and committees, including the Hispanic Center of West Michigan and the Grand Rapids Housing Commission, focusing especially on affordable housing initiatives. Monica believes that diverse perspectives are key to meaningful change, and she works tirelessly to create leadership opportunities, especially for women and Latinas.

A proud daughter of a Dominican mother and West Michigan

father, Monica's connection to her heritage grew stronger over time. Initially raised with a focus on assimilation, she later embraced her Dominican roots and made it a priority to connect her children with their culture. Her involvement in the Hispanic Center and Latina Network has helped her and others overcome feelings of not being "Latina enough," fostering a community of understanding and pride.

Monica also champions economic growth through programs like Rockford's Dimensions initiative, which supports Latino entrepreneurs in construction. By sharing her authentic story and encouraging cultural pride, Monica inspires others to find their voice and carry forward their heritage with confidence.

Ha sido una defensora apasionada de la comunidad latina en West Michigan a lo largo de su carrera. Alcanzó el cargo de Vicepresidenta Senior en Rockford, combinando el éxito profesional con un profundo compromiso comunitario. Ha formado parte de numerosas juntas y comités, como el Centro Hispano de West Michigan y la Comisión de Vivienda de Grand Rapids, enfocándose especialmente en iniciativas de vivienda asequible. Monica cree que las perspectivas diversas son clave para el cambio significativo y trabaja incansablemente para crear oportunidades de liderazgo, especialmente para mujeres y latinas.

Hija orgullosa de una madre dominicana y un padre de West

Michigan, su conexión con sus raíces creció con el tiempo. Criada inicialmente con un enfoque en la asimilación, luego abrazó su herencia dominicana y prioriza que sus hijos conozcan su cultura. Su participación en el Centro Hispano y la Red Latina le ha ayudado a superar sentimientos de no ser "suficientemente latina", fomentando una comunidad de orgullo y comprensión.

Monica también impulsa el crecimiento económico a través del programa Dimensions de Rockford, que apoya a emprendedores latinos en la construcción. Compartiendo su historia auténtica y promoviendo el orgullo cultural, Monica inspira a otros a encontrar su voz y llevar adelante su herencia con confianza.



View Online

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



Dina Elizabeth Suárez

Preserving Salvadoran Culture Through Food El Salvador



Founder and owner of Pupusería El Salvador in Wyoming, Michigan, has been a cultural pioneer in West Michigan's culinary scene. Originally from El Salvador, Dina immigrated to the United States in 1986, first settling in California. In 2005, driven by her desire to represent Salvadoran culture in Grand Rapids, she opened Pupusería El Salvador, the first restaurant in the area dedicated to authentic Salvadoran cuisine.

Dina began humbly—selling pupusas from her home before launching her restaurant. Today, her menu features traditional and unique varieties of pupusas filled with loroco, chipilín, flor

de calabaza, and cactus. She also offers mariscos, soups, carne asada, and more. Her food is not only beloved—it's a form of cultural education, showing the community who Salvadorans are through flavor.

With more than 20 years of culinary experience, Dina is also a local leader. She has participated in cultural events, panels like Downtown Market's Culinary Conversations, and continues to advocate for Latino representation in food. Through her restaurant, she supports her community, preserves her roots, and proves that food can be a powerful bridge between cultures.

Dina Suárez doesn't just make pupusas—she makes history.

Fundadora y dueña de Pupusería El Salvador en Wyoming, Michigan, ha sido una pionera cultural en la escena gastronómica del oeste de Michigan. Originaria de El Salvador, Dina emigró a Estados Unidos en 1986, primero viviendo en California. En 2005, motivada por su deseo de representar la cultura salvadoreña en Grand Rapids, abrió Pupusería El Salvador, el primer restaurante en la zona dedicado a la auténtica cocina salvadoreña.

Comenzó vendiendo pupusas desde su casa antes de abrir su restaurante. Hoy, su menú incluye variedades tradicionales y únicas con loroco, chipilín, flor de calabaza y nopal. También ofrece

mariscos, sopas, carne asada y más. Su comida no solo es querida, sino que también educa culturalmente, mostrando a la comunidad quiénes son los salvadoreños a través del sabor.

Con más de 20 años de experiencia culinaria, Dina también es una líder local. Ha participado en eventos culturales, paneles como Culinary Conversations del Downtown Market y sigue abogando por la representación latina en la gastronomía. A través de su restaurante, apoya a su comunidad, preserva sus raíces y demuestra que la comida puede ser un puente poderoso entre culturas.

Dina Suárez no solo hace pupusas—hace historia.



West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



Luis Eduardo Gomez

México



Has made a significant impact in West Michigan by bridging connections between local businesses and the Latino community. As Director of Retail Facilities at Meijer, Luis has worked tirelessly to include local Latino contractors, electricians, and mechanics in Meijer's procurement processes. This effort has opened doors for Latino-owned businesses, fostering economic growth and opportunities within the community. One of his proudest achievements is integrating eight Latino-owned businesses into Meijer's vendor network, providing them with meaningful projects and ongoing work.

Luis also collaborates with the Mexican Consulate and has served on the board of the Mexican Heritage Association, where he helped promote Mexican culture and heritage in West Michigan

through various events. Additionally, his role with Latin Americans United for Progress (LAUP) highlights his commitment to youth and community development. Although his impact there is often behind the scenes, he plays a crucial role in raising funds and increasing visibility for LAUP's programs that benefit the Latino community.

Luis's journey to leadership started when his family moved to West Michigan in 2018. Despite initial challenges, including being a stay-at-home dad while adjusting to a new country, he leveraged his skills and opportunities to uplift others. His story inspires many, showing how dedication and community spirit can create meaningful change.

Ha tenido un impacto significativo en West Michigan al conectar negocios locales con la comunidad latina. Como Director de Instalaciones Minoristas en Meijer, Luis ha trabajado arduamente para incluir a contratistas, electricistas y mecánicos latinos en los procesos de compras de Meijer. Este esfuerzo ha abierto puertas para negocios latinos, fomentando el crecimiento económico y nuevas oportunidades dentro de la comunidad. Uno de sus logros más destacados es la incorporación de ocho negocios latinos a la red de proveedores de Meijer, otorgándoles proyectos importantes y trabajo continuo.

Luis también colabora con el Consulado Mexicano y formó parte de la junta de la Asociación de Herencia Mexicana, donde promovió la cultura y tradiciones mexicanas en West Michigan a

través de diversos eventos. Además, su rol en Latin Americans United for Progress (LAUP) refleja su compromiso con la juventud y el desarrollo comunitario. Aunque su trabajo es a menudo detrás de escena, desempeña un papel crucial en la recaudación de fondos y en dar visibilidad a los programas de LAUP que benefician a la comunidad latina.

El camino de Luis hacia el liderazgo comenzó en 2018 cuando su familia se mudó a West Michigan. A pesar de los desafíos iniciales, incluyendo ser padre que se queda en casa mientras se adaptaba a un nuevo país, aprovechó sus habilidades y oportunidades para ayudar a otros. Su historia inspira, demostrando cómo la dedicación y el espíritu comunitario pueden generar cambios significativos.



View Online

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



Maria Marquez

Breaking Barriers, Building Futures:

The Maria Marquez Story

México



Is a trailblazing Latina entrepreneur in the insurance industry. As the first and only Latina agent among 400 Farm Bureau agents in Michigan, she is breaking barriers and opening doors for her community. Maria founded her own agency in 2021 and has since mentored, hired, and empowered Latina women across West Michigan.

Born to a single immigrant mother, Maria faced tremendous hardship. She began working at age 11, often moving from place to place, even sleeping in a car. Forced to drop out in 9th grade, she earned her GED while working full time and later obtained her professional licenses in 2013. Her determination led her to

open her own agency—where she has exceeded annual goals every year and earned top honors like Life Elite, All American, and Bronze Level Multiline Sales Council.

More than awards, Maria takes pride in representing Latina women in a male-dominated industry and in mentoring others to reach their potential. Her agency actively supports small businesses, sponsors local events, and gives back to the community.

Maria's greatest achievement? Raising three children while building a career that inspires others to believe in themselves—no matter where they start.

Es una empresaria latina pionera en la industria de seguros. Como la primera y única agente latina entre 400 agentes de Farm Bureau en Michigan, está rompiendo barreras y creando oportunidades para su comunidad. Fundó su propia agencia en 2021, y desde entonces ha contratado, capacitado y empoderado a muchas mujeres latinas en West Michigan.

Nacida en una familia inmigrante monoparental, María enfrentó muchas dificultades. Comenzó a trabajar a los 11 años, vivió en constante movimiento y hasta durmió en un carro. Se vio obligada a dejar la escuela en noveno grado, pero más tarde obtuvo su GED mientras trabajaba tiempo completo. En 2013

obtuvo sus licencias profesionales y, con determinación, abrió su agencia. Desde entonces, ha superado sus metas anuales y ha recibido reconocimientos como Life Elite, All American y Bronze Level Multiline Sales Council.

Más allá de los premios, María se enorgullece de representar a las mujeres latinas en una industria dominada por hombres, y de inspirar a otras a seguir sus sueños. Su agencia apoya negocios locales, patrocina eventos comunitarios y ofrece mentoría profesional. ¿Su mayor logro? Criar a tres hijos hermosos mientras construye una carrera que demuestra que todo es posible, sin importar de dónde vengas.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Rolando Ramos

Building Futures, One Family at a Time:

The Rolando Ramos Legacy

México



Is the founder and president of R & R Mechanical Services, a proudly Latino-owned HVAC company based in Grand Rapids. Since 2008, he has grown the company from a two-man operation into a thriving business that employs over 50 families—80% of whom come from the local Latino community.

Born in rural Mexico and raised in Chicago and Grand Rapids, Rolando experienced firsthand the struggles of immigration, language barriers, and economic hardship. A teacher recognized his potential and helped him enroll in trade school, leading him to discover his passion for HVAC. Through R & R, Rolando offers more than jobs—he creates career pathways for young Latinos

who often lack access to traditional opportunities.

His company provides training, mentorship, and financial stability, empowering employees to build long-term success. Beyond business, Rolando is deeply engaged in the community.

R & R sponsors school supply drives, holiday gift programs, and cultural festivals. He collaborates with organizations like the Hispanic Center, Habitat for Humanity, and Kent County to provide resources for families in need.

For Rolando, business is a vehicle for service. His mission is to build futures, one job and one family at a time—leaving a legacy of hope, opportunity, and orgullo Latino.

Es el fundador y presidente de R & R Mechanical Services, una empresa de HVAC con sede en Grand Rapids y orgullosamente de propiedad latina. Desde 2008, ha hecho crecer su negocio de dos personas a una empresa sólida que emplea a más de 50 familias, el 80% provenientes de la comunidad latina local.

Nacido en un pequeño pueblo rural en México y criado en Chicago y Grand Rapids, Rolando vivió en carne propia los desafíos de la inmigración, el idioma y las dificultades económicas. Fue un maestro quien vio su potencial y lo ayudó a inscribirse en una escuela técnica, donde descubrió su pasión por el HVAC.

A través de R & R, Rolando ofrece más que empleos: crea oportu-

nidades de carrera para jóvenes latinos que muchas veces no tienen acceso a caminos tradicionales.

Su empresa brinda capacitación, mentoría y estabilidad financiera para construir un futuro sólido. Más allá del negocio, Rolando está comprometido con su comunidad. R & R apoya campañas de útiles escolares, festivales culturales y programas de ayuda en invierno.

Colabora con organizaciones como el Hispanic Center y Habitat for Humanity para apoyar a familias necesitadas. Para Rolando, el negocio es una forma de servir: construyendo futuros, una familia y un trabajo a la vez.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



Angelita Valdez

Healing, Leading, and Building
for the Latino Community
México & Puerto Rico



Angelita Valdez, bilingual Behavioral Health Therapist and founder of Servicios de Esperanza, LLC, is breaking systemic barriers in West Michigan. As the only Spanish-speaking substance abuse counselor and Registered Play Therapist Supervisor in Muskegon and Oceana counties, Angelita provides trauma-informed care for Latino children and families who often lack access to culturally responsive services.

Beyond therapy, she uplifts first-generation students and clinicians of color through mentorship and supervision, fostering future leaders in mental health. In 2024, she launched Consulta con Esperanza, LLC, mentoring emerging Latino entrepreneurs and collaborating with the Muskegon Chamber of Commerce to

build a Latino business sector.

Angelita also founded two nonprofits: Centro de Esperanza (2023) and Mijas Juntas (2025), expanding services and leadership opportunities for Latinas. Her statewide advocacy includes a gubernatorial appointment to the Hispanic/Latino Commission of Michigan (2022–2024), where she advanced policies for equity and inclusion.

Her passion is rooted in her parents' legacy of community service and cultural pride. Through therapy, entrepreneurship, and philanthropy—including the Angel Luis & Connie Navarro Legacia Fund—Angelita is building generational impact. Her mission is clear: to heal, empower, and create pathways so others can rise even higher.

Angelita Valdez, terapeuta bilingüe de salud mental y fundadora de Servicios de Esperanza, LLC, está derribando barreras sistémicas en West Michigan. Es la única consejera en abuso de sustancias que habla español y la única Supervisora de Terapia de Juego Registrada en los condados de Muskegon y Oceana, brindando atención informada por el trauma a niños y familias latinas que rara vez tienen acceso a servicios culturalmente adecuados.

Además de su labor clínica, apoya a estudiantes de primera generación y a profesionales de color mediante mentoría y supervisión, formando futuros líderes en salud mental. En 2024, lanzó Consulta con Esperanza, LLC, una empresa de mentoría para emprendedores latinos, en colaboración con la Cámara de

Comercio de Muskegon para desarrollar un sector empresarial latino.

Fundó también dos organizaciones sin fines de lucro: Centro de Esperanza (2023) y Mijas Juntas (2025), ampliando servicios y liderazgo para mujeres latinas. Su defensa a nivel estatal incluye una designación por la Gobernadora Whitmer a la Comisión Hispana/Latina de Michigan (2022–2024), promoviendo equidad y acceso.

Inspirada por el legado de sus padres, Angelita lidera con propósito, construyendo un impacto generacional a través de terapia, mentoría y filantropía. Su misión: sanar, empoderar y abrir caminos para que otros lleguen más lejos.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Carlos Martinez

Building Inclusive Systems for Latino Healing and Economic Empowerment Dominican Republic



Carlos Martinez has dedicated his career to creating more inclusive, culturally responsive systems for Latino communities across West Michigan. As President of People First Economy, he is expanding access to sustainable business education and economic tools for Latino and BIPOC entrepreneurs. Under his leadership, programs now offer Spanish-language support and culturally relevant resources that prioritize equity and inclusion.

Carlos is also the co-founder of Art of Mind, one of the region's most comprehensive bilingual mental health consulting services. Through therapy, training, and workplace strategy—all offered in English and Spanish—Art of Mind breaks down financial and cultural barriers that often keep Latino families from receiving care.

By partnering with nonprofits, they also provide no-cost therapy to underinsured immigrant clients.

Born in the Dominican Republic and raised in Grand Rapids, Carlos' community work is deeply personal. From launching college access programs to mentoring students at Grand Valley State University, his life's work reflects a belief that community-led change is the most powerful kind. He also serves on the Samaritas Currents Council, ensuring Latino voices are represented in statewide care systems.

For Carlos, leadership is about purpose, not titles. His mission remains clear: to help Latino communities heal, thrive, and lead with dignity.

Carlos Martinez ha dedicado su carrera a construir sistemas más inclusivos y culturalmente relevantes para las comunidades latinas en West Michigan. Como Presidente de People First Economy, está ampliando el acceso a herramientas de desarrollo económico y educación empresarial sostenible para emprendedores latinos y de comunidades BIPOC. Bajo su liderazgo, los programas ahora incluyen materiales en español y recursos adaptados culturalmente.

Carlos también es cofundador de Art of Mind, uno de los servicios de consultoría en salud mental bilingüe más completos de la región. A través de terapia, capacitación y estrategias organizacionales—todo en inglés y español—Art of Mind elimina barreras económicas y culturales que suelen limitar el acceso a

cuidados mentales para familias latinas. En alianza con organizaciones sin fines de lucro, también ofrecen servicios gratuitos a clientes inmigrantes sin seguro médico.

Nacido en la República Dominicana y criado en Grand Rapids, la labor comunitaria de Carlos es profundamente personal. Desde crear programas de acceso universitario hasta ser mentor en Grand Valley State University, su trabajo refleja una creencia firme en el poder del cambio liderado por la comunidad. También forma parte del Samaritas Currents Council, asegurando que las voces latinas estén presentes en decisiones estatales.

Para Carlos, el liderazgo no se trata de títulos, sino de propósito. Su misión: ayudar a que nuestras comunidades latinas sanen, prosperen y lideren con dignidad.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Zoraida Sanchez

A Lifelong Advocate and Trailblazer
for the Latino Community
Puerto Rico



Since arriving in Grand Rapids in 1976, Zoraida Sanchez has been a fearless advocate for the Hispanic community. With a background in social services in Puerto Rico, she began her U.S. journey at the Hispanic Institute, quickly rising to become Director of Latin American Services in 1980. Over the next 22 years, she led programs that transformed lives—most notably the Hispanic Senior Citizens Program—while holding seats on over 12 local boards and three governor-appointed state commissions.

Zoraida fought tirelessly against injustice and discrimination, advocating with school superintendents, police chiefs, and elected officials. Her leadership helped establish bilingual education programs, hospital translation units, and diversity training within

law enforcement.

After retiring due to illness in 2002, she founded a successful income tax and translation business, creating jobs for nine Hispanic workers and preparing taxes for over 2,000 clients. Her tax preparation courses have empowered many to launch their own businesses.

Today, Zoraida continues mentoring youth, advising politicians, and inspiring students—often becoming a guest of honor at their graduations. Her book *Mujeres in Business*, co-authored with Isabel Flores, offers guidance to future Latina entrepreneurs.

Zoraida's life is rooted in purpose, passion, and impact—a legacy still growing, until the day she's called home.

Desde su llegada a Grand Rapids en 1976, Zoraida Sanchez ha sido una incansable defensora de la comunidad hispana. Con experiencia previa en servicios sociales en Puerto Rico, inició su labor en el Hispanic Institute, y en 1980 se convirtió en Directora de Latin American Services. Durante 22 años lideró programas que cambiaron vidas, como el Programa para Personas Mayores Hispanas, y participó en más de 12 juntas locales y tres comisiones estatales nombradas por el gobernador.

Zoraida luchó contra la injusticia sin temor, enfrentando a superintendentes, jefes de policía y funcionarios públicos cuando se trataba de defender a su gente. Impulsó la educación bilingüe, la contratación de hispanos en hospitales y programas de capa-

citación cultural para la policía.

En 2002, tras retirarse por motivos de salud, fundó un exitoso negocio de preparación de impuestos y traducciones, creando empleo para nueve hispanos y sirviendo a más de 2,000 clientes. Sus cursos han capacitado a muchos para iniciar sus propios negocios.

Hoy sigue guiando a jóvenes, aconsejando a políticos e inspirando a estudiantes, quienes la consideran una figura ejemplar. Su libro *Mujeres in Business*, coescrito con Isabel Flores, es una fuente de inspiración para futuras empresarias latinas.

La vida de Zoraida está marcada por la pasión, el servicio y un legado que sigue creciendo.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Eloy Garza

From Migrant Camp to Champion of the Latino Workforce México



Eloy Garza's journey began in the migrant camps of West Michigan, where he learned early what it means to be overlooked and undervalued. Today, as the founder and CEO of Garza Labor, he's rewriting that story—not just for himself, but for thousands of Latino workers across the country. Garza Labor isn't your average staffing agency.

Under Eloy's leadership, it's become a lifeline—offering safe housing, transportation, fair wages, and benefits for migrant and seasonal workers who are too often forgotten. Eloy knows the struggles they face because he lived them. That empathy drives every decision he makes. But Eloy's impact goes beyond business.

He's a tireless advocate for labor reform, proposing a Temporary Labor Sponsor (TLS) program to create safer, more structured pathways for immigrant workers. He also gives back through community drives, supports veterans, and invests in young people who, like him, grew up with little but dreamed of more. What makes Eloy influential is not just what he's built—but how he leads.

With heart, humility, and a commitment to raising the standard for his people, Eloy proves that success and service can go hand in hand. His story is one of transformation—and a reminder that leadership begins with knowing where you come from.

La historia de Eloy Garza comenzó en los campamentos migrantes de West Michigan, donde aprendió desde niño lo que es ser ignorado y subestimado. Hoy, como fundador y CEO de Garza Labor, está cambiando esa narrativa, no sólo para él, sino para miles de trabajadores latinos en todo el país. Garza Labor no es una agencia de empleo común.

Bajo el liderazgo de Eloy, se ha convertido en un verdadero apoyo: ofrece vivienda segura, transporte, salarios justos y beneficios para trabajadores migrantes y temporales que a menudo son invisibilizados.

Eloy entiende sus luchas porque él mismo las vivió—y por eso lidera con empatía y acción.

Su impacto también se refleja en la defensa de políticas laborales más justas. Ha propuesto el programa de Patrocinador Laboral Temporal (TLS), que brindaría protección y estructura a los trabajadores inmigrantes. Además, Eloy retribuye a su comunidad con colectas de ayuda, apoyo a veteranos, y mentoría para jóvenes que, como él, crecieron sin recursos pero con grandes sueños.

Lo que hace influyente a Eloy no es solo lo que ha construido, sino cómo lo ha hecho: con corazón, humildad y un compromiso inquebrantable con su gente. Su historia nos recuerda que el verdadero liderazgo nace de no olvidar de dónde venimos.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Melissa Boughner

Reimagining What's Possible for
Latino Families in West Michigan

El Salvador



As President of the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan, Melissa Boughner leads with both vision and lived experience. A first-generation Latina and immigrant from El Salvador, Melissa has turned her personal journey of resilience into a bold mission to uplift Latino families across the region.

Under her leadership, the Hispanic Center launched Heart at the Centro, a \$7.5 million capital campaign that will bring life-changing services—like early childhood care, legal advocacy, and workforce development—into one state-of-the-art community hub. Her expansion into Lakeshore communities through the Tri-Cities Puentes Initiative ensures Latino residents from Grand Haven to Ferrysburg have access to culturally competent support

and representation.

Melissa's work goes beyond services. In 2025, she led the launch of a \$1.2 million micro-loan fund for Latino entrepreneurs in Kent County, removing systemic barriers to capital and creating new paths to generational wealth.

A former undocumented student, housecleaner, and painter's assistant, Melissa's leadership is rooted in sacrifice and courage. She is not just building programs—she's building the world she needed as a child.

Whether in boardrooms or community centers, Melissa shows that the Latino community is not just surviving—but leading, thriving, and claiming space with pride, power, and permanence.

Como presidenta del Hispanic Center of Western Michigan, Melissa Boughner lidera con visión y una historia de vida marcada por la resiliencia. Inmigrante de El Salvador y primera generación en su familia, Melissa ha transformado sus propias luchas en una misión para empoderar a las familias latinas en toda la región.

Bajo su liderazgo, el Centro lanzó Heart at the Centro, una campaña de capital de \$7.5 millones para construir un centro comunitario que ofrecerá servicios transformadores como cuidado infantil, asistencia legal, clases, y desarrollo laboral—todo bajo un mismo techo. Además, con la adquisición de la Tri-Cities Puentes Initiative, ha extendido servicios a las comunidades la-

tinias de Grand Haven, Spring Lake y Ferrysburg.

En 2025, lanzó un fondo de microcréditos de \$1.2 millones para empresarios latinos del condado de Kent, eliminando barreras al acceso al capital y promoviendo la creación de riqueza generacional. Melissa conoce el sacrificio de cerca. Fue estudiante sin documentos, limpiadora de casas y la pintora número uno de su papá.

Su liderazgo no es simbólico—es transformador. Hoy, su trabajo demuestra que la comunidad latina no solo resiste—también lidera, prospera y reclama su espacio con orgullo, fuerza y propósito duradero.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Nelson Sánchez

Building Opportunity Through Humble Leadership and Purpose

Cuba



Nelson Sánchez, CEO of RoMan Manufacturing, embodies servant leadership rooted in faith, compassion, and action. A Cuban immigrant who arrived in Grand Rapids at the age of five, Nelson's life has been shaped by resilience, family, and a deep commitment to helping others thrive.

His personal journey—from translating for his parents as a child to becoming a CPA and executive leader—reflects his belief in second chances and the transformative power of opportunity.

At RoMan, he ensures the workforce reflects the community, intentionally hiring Latino employees and providing English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to empower success.

As a longtime board member of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce and other key organizations, Nelson advocates for Latino entrepreneurs and community development. His efforts are quiet but impactful—creating jobs, opening doors, and connecting people to new possibilities.

Sánchez credits his values to the example of his parents, who opened their home to new Cuban immigrants as a way to "pay it forward." Today, he continues that legacy by building paths for others. Guided by faith, humility, and integrity, Nelson believes leadership is not about titles—it's about service, heart, and believing in the potential of every person.

Nelson Sánchez, CEO de RoMan Manufacturing, es un líder humilde cuya vida está guiada por la fe, la compasión y un fuerte sentido de propósito. Inmigrante cubano que llegó a Grand Rapids a los cinco años, su historia está marcada por la resiliencia familiar y el deseo constante de ayudar a otros a salir adelante.

Desde joven, Nelson fue el intérprete de su familia y, con esfuerzo, se convirtió en CPA y líder empresarial.

Hoy en día, se asegura de que la fuerza laboral de RoMan refleje la diversidad de la comunidad. Ha implementado clases de inglés (ESL) para empleados hispanos, eliminando barreras y fortaleciendo oportunidades.

Como miembro de la Junta Directiva de la Cámara de Comercio de Grand Rapids y otras organizaciones clave, Nelson defiende activamente a los emprendedores latinos y fomenta el desarrollo económico inclusivo.

Su impacto no busca reconocimiento; se enfoca en crear empleos, abrir puertas y conectar a las personas con nuevas oportunidades.

Inspirado por sus padres, quienes ayudaron a otros inmigrantes cubanos al llegar a EE. UU., Nelson continúa ese legado. Su liderazgo se basa en el servicio, la fe y la creencia de que todos merecen una oportunidad. Para él, liderar es servir y confiar en el potencial humano.



View Online

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



Elisa Rodriguez

Empowering the Latino Community
Through Business, Advocacy, and Faith

México



Elisa Rodriguez is a business owner, mentor, and advocate whose life's work centers on empowering the Latino community in West Michigan. As founder of M&I Interiors, a Latina- and woman-owned business, Elisa uses her platform to support Latino entrepreneurs through mentorship, leadership training, and financial literacy.

She has organized free business acumen workshops and partnered with banks like Huntington and the Opportunity Resource Fund to expand access to capital and strengthen financial health among Latino small business owners. Her goal is to foster economic independence and long-term sustainability for the underserved.

Elisa also mentors first-generation college students, participa-

tes in incubator programs, and advocates for equity in housing, employment, and education. She partners with nonprofit organizations to reduce barriers related to language, transportation, and healthcare access.

Raised in a tight-knit immigrant neighborhood, Elisa understands the value of hard work, faith, and community.

Her leadership is driven not by titles but by action—uplifting others while staying deeply rooted in cultural pride and service. As she says, “The sun comes out for everyone.”

Elisa is not only a connector, but a mirror of her community's strength and a window into its potential. Her work proves that ordinary people, united by purpose, can achieve extraordinary things.

Elisa Rodríguez es empresaria, mentora y defensora de la comunidad, dedicada a empoderar a los latinos en West Michigan. Como fundadora de M & I Interiors, una empresa propiedad de una mujer latina, Elisa utiliza su plataforma para apoyar a emprendedores latinos mediante mentoría, formación en liderazgo y educación financiera.

Ha organizado talleres gratuitos de negocios y colaborado con instituciones como Huntington Bank y Opportunity Resource Fund para mejorar el acceso a capital y fortalecer la salud financiera de pequeños empresarios latinos. Su objetivo es fomentar la independencia económica y la sostenibilidad a largo plazo en comunidades desatendidas.

Elisa también apoya a estudiantes universitarios de primera

generación, participa en programas de incubadoras de negocios y aboga por la equidad en vivienda, empleo y educación. En alianza con organizaciones sin fines de lucro, trabaja para eliminar barreras relacionadas con el idioma, el transporte y el acceso a la salud.

Criada en un vecindario inmigrante unido, Elisa valora el trabajo duro, la fe y la comunidad. Su liderazgo no depende de títulos, sino de acciones que elevan a otros con orgullo cultural y compromiso.

Como dice: “El sol sale para todos.” Elisa es un reflejo de la fortaleza de su comunidad y una ventana a su potencial. Su labor demuestra que las personas comunes, unidas por un propósito, logran cosas extraordinarias.



West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



Arturo Morales Romero

Painting Culture, History, and
Hope in Grand Rapids

México



Arturo Morales Romero's art is more than color and form—it's a bridge connecting past, present, and future for the Latino community in Grand Rapids. Born in Tepetixtla, Guerrero, Mexico, Arturo's passion for art began at age five, inspired by colorful pebbles beneath his feet. Migrating to California as a child, he worked in the fields while pursuing his education and artistic growth. Early mentorship with the Visalia Teen Mural Club sparked his love for large murals, a powerful medium for storytelling and cultural expression.

After facing ethnic discrimination in North Carolina, Arturo found a vibrant art home in Grand Rapids starting in 2014. Here, his murals celebrate Latino history and folklore, adorning public

spaces like Sanchez Bistro and Super Mercado Mexico. He has participated in ArtPrize multiple times, gaining recognition while inspiring others.

Arturo's commitment extends beyond creating art—he mentors both young and older artists, sharing skills and confidence to empower self-expression. Through donating artwork for scholarships and giving 10% of his earnings to fund free art lessons at local Mexican festivals, he embodies his philosophy: knowledge is the true gift to the community.

Supported by his wife Erika and children, Arturo's art uplifts, educates, and builds pride in a community he proudly calls home.

El arte de Arturo Morales Romero es más que color y forma: es un puente que conecta el pasado, presente y futuro de la comunidad latina en Grand Rapids. Nacido en Tepetixtla, Guerrero, México, la pasión de Arturo por el arte comenzó a los cinco años, inspirado por los coloridos guajarras bajo sus pies. Emigró a California de niño, donde trabajó en los campos mientras seguía su educación y crecimiento artístico. Su temprano aprendizaje con el Visalia Teen Mural Club despertó su amor por los grandes murales, un medio poderoso para contar historias y expresar la cultura.

Después de enfrentar discriminación étnica en Carolina del Norte, Arturo encontró un hogar artístico vibrante en Grand Rapids desde 2014. Aquí, sus murales celebran la historia y el fol-

lore latino, adornando espacios públicos como Sánchez Bistro y Super Mercado México. Ha participado en ArtPrize varias veces, ganando reconocimiento y motivando a otros.

El compromiso de Arturo va más allá de crear arte: mentorizar a artistas jóvenes y adultos, compartiendo habilidades y confianza para empoderar la autoexpresión.

Donando obras para becas y destinando el 10% de sus ingresos a ofrecer clases gratuitas en festivales mexicanos locales, encarna su filosofía: el conocimiento es el verdadero regalo para la comunidad. Apoyado por su esposa Erika y sus hijos, el arte de Arturo eleva, educa y construye orgullo en una comunidad que llama orgullosamente su hogar.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Sonia Treviño

Uplifting Hispanic Voices Through Education
and Cultural Empowerment

México



Sonia Treviño, Director of the Hispanic/Latino Cultural Center at Ferris State University, is a passionate advocate for educational equity and cultural celebration within West Michigan's Hispanic community. A proud first-generation college graduate from the border town of Rio Hondo, Texas, Sonia uses her journey to inspire and empower others to pursue higher education and embrace their cultural identity.

Under her leadership, the Center has become a hub for mentorship, cultural programming, and academic success. She created impactful programs like Ferris Familia and expanded outreach to Latinx-majority high schools through Promesa Summer Success, a dual enrollment initiative offering free college cre-

dit. Through events such as Hispanic Heritage Month celebrations and Día de los Muertos, she builds pride and belonging across campus.

Sonia's advocacy goes beyond Ferris. As a board member of Migrant Legal Aid, she champions the rights of migrant farmworkers and their families.

She also collaborates with organizations like LAUP and the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan to bridge educational and economic gaps for Latinx youth. Currently pursuing her doctoral degree, Sonia leads with authenticity, compassion, and purpose. Her work reflects a lifelong commitment to uplifting underserved communities and ensuring that the doors to education—and to opportunity—remain open for all.

Sonia Treviño, Directora del Centro Cultural Hispano/Latino de Ferris State University, es una defensora incansable de la equidad educativa y del orgullo cultural en la comunidad hispana de West Michigan. Originaria de Rio Hondo, Texas, y primera generación universitaria, Sonia utiliza su historia personal para inspirar a otros a alcanzar sus metas académicas y abrazar su identidad cultural.

Bajo su liderazgo, el Centro se ha convertido en un espacio vital de mentoría, apoyo académico y celebración cultural. Ha creado programas como Ferris Familia y ha liderado iniciativas como Promesa Summer Success, un programa de doble matrícula que ofrece créditos universitarios gratuitos para estudiantes

de secundaria de comunidades latinas.

También ha impulsado celebraciones significativas como el Mes de la Herencia Hispana y el Día de los Muertos, fomentando el sentido de pertenencia en el campus.

Fuera de la universidad, Sonia sirve en la junta de Migrant Legal Aid, apoyando los derechos de trabajadores agrícolas migrantes. Además, colabora con LAUP y el Hispanic Center para cerrar brechas educativas y económicas.

Hoy, mientras cursa su doctorado, Sonia continúa liderando con autenticidad y compromiso. Su misión es clara: abrir caminos para que otros también puedan soñar, lograr y liderar.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Gustavo Cueto

Empowering the Hispanic Community Through Financial Education and Mentorship

México



Gustavo Cueto is a passionate advocate for financial wellness and career empowerment within the Hispanic community. Backed by a Fortune 90 company with over 170 years of history, Gustavo leads efforts to provide world-class financial products and services tailored to support Hispanic individuals and families. His leadership has focused on mentoring young Hispanic professionals and opening doors to careers in financial services—an industry often underrepresented by Latinos.

Having arrived in the United States with limited resources and knowledge, Gustavo's personal journey has fueled his commitment to giving back. He believes that financial education is not a

luxury, but a necessity for the prosperity of future generations. Through honest, accessible conversations, he educates community leaders and residents alike on how to take full advantage of the financial tools available to them.

Gustavo's impact extends beyond business. His mission is rooted in honoring the sacrifices of those who came before—those who left behind their language and familiar lives so that future generations could thrive. By mentoring the next generation and expanding access to financial literacy, Gustavo is helping build a stronger, more empowered Hispanic community—one that is confident, prepared, and financially resilient.

Gustavo Cueto es un defensor apasionado del bienestar financiero y del desarrollo profesional dentro de la comunidad hispana. Con el respaldo de una empresa Fortune 90 con más de 170 años de trayectoria, lidera iniciativas que ofrecen productos y servicios financieros de clase mundial enfocados en apoyar a individuos y familias hispanas.

Su liderazgo se ha centrado en orientar a jóvenes profesionales hispanos, abriendo caminos hacia carreras en el sector financiero—un campo donde la representación latina aún es limitada. Gustavo llegó a Estados Unidos con pocos recursos y escasos conocimientos sobre el sistema financiero.

Esa experiencia lo impulsa hoy a retribuir a su comunidad,

convencido de que la educación financiera no es un lujo, sino una herramienta esencial para el futuro.

A través de charlas honestas y accesibles, brinda educación y conciencia financiera a líderes comunitarios y ciudadanos, fomentando el conocimiento y uso de los recursos disponibles para todos.

El impacto de Gustavo va más allá del ámbito profesional. Su labor honra el sacrificio de quienes dejaron atrás su idioma y su mundo para que las nuevas generaciones prosperen. Al mentorear a jóvenes y promover la alfabetización financiera, Gustavo está construyendo una comunidad hispana más fuerte, preparada y resiliente.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Leonard Vielma Jr.

Advancing Latino Voices in Healthcare and Beyond

México



Leonard Vielma Jr. is a first-generation Latino leader who is helping transform healthcare and professional development for the Latino community in West Michigan. As Manager of External Strategic Partnerships at Corewell Health, Leonard has championed equity, access, and inclusion through culturally responsive initiatives that break barriers and build bridges.

He co-founded and co-chairs Corewell Health's Latino Employee Resource Group (ERG), which has grown into a vital leadership body that shapes recruitment, policy, and community engagement.

Under his guidance, the ERG has promoted bilingual outreach, created mentorship pathways, and organized legal and wellness

education events tailored to Latino communities. Leonard also helped launch an ESL-focused Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program in partnership with the Literacy Center of West Michigan and the Hispanic Center, expanding career access for English language learners. He continues to foster partnerships with Latino-owned businesses and nonprofits, driving workforce development and culturally grounded care.

Outside of Corewell, Leonard serves on the board of the Michigan Chapter of the National Association of Latino Healthcare Executives and is Vice President of External Relations for the Latino Spartans alumni board. His leadership is rooted in service, representation, and paving the way for future generations to thrive in health, education, and leadership.

Leonard Vielma Jr. es un líder latino de primera generación que está transformando el acceso al cuidado de la salud y el desarrollo profesional para la comunidad latina en West Michigan. Como Gerente de Alianzas Estratégicas Externas en Corewell Health, ha promovido iniciativas que rompen barreras y construyen puentes hacia la equidad y la inclusión.

Leonard co-fundó y preside el Grupo de Recursos para Empleados Latinos (ERG) de Corewell Health, que hoy influye en políticas, contratación y relaciones comunitarias. Bajo su liderazgo, el ERG ha impulsado el alcance bilingüe, creado programas de mentoría y organizado eventos educativos enfocados en las necesidades legales y de bienestar de la comunidad latina.

Junto al Literacy Center y el Hispanic Center, ayudó a lanzar un programa de CNA (asistente de enfermería certificado) adaptado a personas que aprenden inglés como segundo idioma, brindando nuevas oportunidades laborales a quienes enfrentan barreras lingüísticas.

Fuera de Corewell, Leonard es miembro del directorio de la Asociación Nacional de Ejecutivos Latinos de Salud (NALHE) en Michigan y vicepresidente de relaciones externas de Latino Spartans, fortaleciendo redes para exalumnos y estudiantes latinos de MSU. Su liderazgo está guiado por el servicio, la representación y el compromiso de abrir camino para futuras generaciones.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



Edwin Collazo

Brewing Culture: Edwin Collazo's Mission to Celebrate and Empower the Latino Community Puerto Rico



Is a community leader, entrepreneur, and cultural advocate who uses his platform to elevate Latino voices in West Michigan. A graduate of Cornerstone University with degrees in Education and Child Development, Edwin spent eight years working in alternative and prison education before becoming a financial advisor. In 2014, he followed his passion and founded City Built Brewing Company—a business rooted in community, culture, and connection.

Through City Built, Edwin created the Mi Gente Collaboration, a project that highlights Latino and Hispanic contributions to the brewing industry. The initiative supports nonprofits like Somos Comunidad and the Latina Network of West Michigan, while ce-

lebrating Latino culture through food, music, and craft beer. City Built is also a founding member of Latino Craft Beer Week in Colorado and a participant in Suave Fest, a national festival showcasing Latino-owned breweries.

Edwin has spoken at the Latin Youth Summit, Grand Rapids Public Schools, and serves on the board of the West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. His company makes donations to the Grand Rapids Public School programs that support youth sports and educators.

For Edwin, brewing beer is a vehicle for storytelling, celebration, and representation—building a culture that reflects the richness of the Latino community.

Es un líder comunitario, emprendedor y defensor cultural que usa su plataforma para elevar las voces latinas en West Michigan. Graduado de Cornerstone University con títulos en Educación y Desarrollo Infantil, Edwin trabajó ocho años en educación alternativa y en prisiones antes de convertirse en asesor financiero. En 2014, decidió seguir su pasión y fundó City Built Brewing Company, una empresa basada en la comunidad, la cultura y la conexión.

A través de City Built, Edwin creó la Colaboración Mi Gente, un proyecto que destaca las contribuciones latinas e hispanas a la industria cervecera. Esta iniciativa apoya a organizaciones como Somos Comunidad y la Red Latina de West Michigan, y celebra

la cultura latina mediante la comida, la música y la cerveza artesanal. City Built también es miembro fundador de la Semana de la Cerveza Artesanal Latina en Colorado y participa en Suave Fest, un festival nacional que exhibe cervecerías de dueños latinos.

Edwin ha sido orador en el Latin Youth Summit, en las Escuelas Públicas de Grand Rapids, y es miembro de la junta de la Cámara de Comercio Hispana de West Michigan. Su empresa hace donaciones a programas escolares que apoyan deportes juveniles y maestros.

Para Edwin, hacer cerveza es contar historias, celebrar y representar la riqueza de la comunidad latina.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



SCAN ME

Andrey Marchena

Empowering Latinos in Autism Support and Hospitality Leadership

Costa Rica



Andrey Marchena's journey is a testament to resilience, leadership, and advocacy. As a former board member and current advisor to Autism Support of Kent County, Andrey has championed the needs of Latino families facing autism. Through culturally sensitive outreach and bilingual resources, he has worked to eliminate barriers and ensure every family feels seen, supported, and empowered.

But his mission doesn't stop there. As Director of Operations at the JW Marriott, Andrey has become a voice for Latino representation in the hospitality industry.

Having started as a bellman, he understands the challenges Latino workers face in advancing beyond entry-level roles. His ef-

forts focus on mentorship, leadership development, and opening doors for others to rise.

Born and raised in Costa Rica, Andrey's background instilled in him a deep respect for hard work and community. Today, he's building bridges between underserved communities and the opportunities they deserve—whether through hotel shadowing programs in local schools or by supporting inclusive hiring and promotion practices within AHC Hospitality.

For Andrey, advocacy is personal. It's about creating lasting change—not just for today's workforce, but for future generations. His story is a powerful reminder that with support and determination, Latinos can lead in every space they occupy.

La historia de Andrey Marchena es un ejemplo de resiliencia, liderazgo y compromiso con su comunidad. Como ex miembro de la junta y actual asesor de Autism Support of Kent County, ha defendido los derechos de las familias latinas que enfrentan los retos del autismo. Mediante recursos bilingües y educación culturalmente sensible, ha trabajado para derribar barreras y garantizar que ninguna familia se sienta sola.

Además, desde su rol como Director de Operaciones del JW Marriott, Andrey impulsa una mayor representación latina en la industria hotelera. Habiendo comenzado como maletero, conoce de cerca los desafíos que enfrentan los trabajadores latinos para

avanzar profesionalmente. Su enfoque se centra en la mentoría, el desarrollo de liderazgo y la creación de oportunidades reales de crecimiento.

Nacido y criado en Costa Rica, su origen le inculcó el valor del trabajo duro y el sentido de comunidad. Hoy, construye puentes entre los jóvenes latinos y las oportunidades que merecen, ya sea mediante programas escolares de orientación hotelera o promoviendo prácticas laborales inclusivas en AHC Hospitality. Para Andrey, la defensa de la comunidad es una misión personal. Su historia nos recuerda que, con apoyo y determinación, los latinos no solo contribuyen, sino que también lideran.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



Dr. Cristóbal Rodríguez

Building Systems of Equity and Opportunity
in West Michigan
México



Dr. Cristóbal Rodríguez serves as Associate Provost for Equity-Centered Initiatives at Western Michigan University, where he has become a driving force for systemic change in higher education—especially for Latino students. A first-generation college graduate, Dr. Rodríguez understands the barriers many Latino families face and has committed his career to breaking them down.

He led the launch of WMU's Latino Student Success initiative, boosting enrollment and retention through strategic outreach, community partnerships, and culturally responsive student support. Latino enrollment grew from 7% to 9% under his leadership—evidence of a growing pipeline from K-12 schools to college and beyond.

Dr. Rodríguez also spearheaded regional collaborations with K-12 districts and community colleges to create seamless pathways to higher education and high-demand careers. From internships to industry certifications, his programs provide Latino students with tangible tools for success.

Nationally, he brings West Michigan's voice to the White House, serving on President Biden's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics. Whether on campus or in the capital, he advocates for policies that expand opportunity for all.

Rooted in his own story and propelled by a vision of equity, Dr. Rodríguez is building an educational ecosystem where Latino students don't just access college—they thrive in it.

El Dr. Cristóbal Rodríguez, actual Vicerrector Asociado de Iniciativas Centradas en la Equidad en la Universidad de Western Michigan (WMU), es un líder clave en la transformación del sistema educativo superior—particularmente en beneficio de los estudiantes latinos. Como graduado universitario de primera generación, conoce de primera mano los desafíos que enfrentan muchas familias latinas y ha dedicado su carrera a derribar esas barreras.

Bajo su liderazgo, WMU lanzó la Iniciativa de Éxito Estudiantil Latino, aumentando la inscripción y retención de estudiantes latinos mediante alianzas comunitarias y apoyo académico culturalmente relevante. La matrícula latina creció del 7% al 9%, reflejando un fortalecimiento del acceso a la educación superior.

El Dr. Rodríguez también ha impulsado colaboraciones regio-

nales con escuelas K-12 y colegios comunitarios para establecer rutas educativas que conectan a los estudiantes latinos con carreras en demanda. Desde pasantías hasta certificaciones profesionales, sus programas preparan a los estudiantes para el éxito académico y profesional.

A nivel nacional, representa a West Michigan en la Comisión Asesora Presidencial para la Excelencia Educativa de los Hispanos, nombrado por el presidente Biden. Su trabajo impacta tanto a nivel local como federal.

Inspirado por su historia personal y una visión de justicia, el Dr. Rodríguez está construyendo un sistema educativo donde los estudiantes latinos no solo acceden a la universidad—sino que triunfan en ella.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



Eva S. Alexander

Leading with Purpose and Uplifting

Latino Communities

México



Eva S. Alexander is a trailblazing leader, immigrant, and advocate whose work has transformed access, equity, and representation for Latino and immigrant communities in West Michigan. As Chair of Exalta Health's Board of Directors, she has championed culturally responsive health-care for underserved populations, helping to guide strategic transitions and expand impact.

Her commitment to the community is far-reaching. She led the Ambassador Committee at the West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, connecting Latino entrepreneurs with economic opportunity. As a cultural organizer, she helped coordinate the Grand Rapids Mexican Festival, celebrating Latino heritage and pride.

In her state leadership role at the Office of Global Michigan, Eva is advancing language access and inclusive workforce development statewide, ensuring immigrants and bilingual communities have pathways to success. Previously, she served as Executive Director of an immigration law nonprofit, advocating for immigrant families and expanding access to legal support.

Eva's leadership is rooted in her personal story—arriving in the U.S. at 12, helping her single mother navigate life in a new country, and rising through hard work and purpose. Today, she leads with urgency, passion, and action. Her mission is clear: to elevate Latino voices, remove systemic barriers, and inspire the next generation to lead with courage and purpose.

Eva S. Alexander es una líder visionaria, inmigrante y defensora incansable que ha transformado el acceso, la equidad y la representación para las comunidades latinas e inmigrantes en West Michigan. Como presidenta de la Junta Directiva de Exalta Health, ha promovido atención médica culturalmente competente para poblaciones desatendidas, liderando transiciones estratégicas y fortaleciendo el impacto de la organización.

Su compromiso comunitario es amplio. Lideró el Comité de Embajadores de la Cámara de Comercio Hispana de West Michigan, conectando emprendedores latinos con oportunidades económicas. También ayudó a organizar el Festival Mexicano de

Grand Rapids, celebrando la herencia y el orgullo cultural latino.

Desde su puesto estatal en la Oficina de Global Michigan, impulsa el acceso al idioma y el desarrollo laboral inclusivo a nivel estatal, asegurando que inmigrantes y comunidades bilingües tengan oportunidades reales de éxito. Anteriormente, fue directora ejecutiva de una organización legal sin fines de lucro, abogando por familias inmigrantes.

El liderazgo de Eva nace de su historia personal: llegó a EE.UU. a los 12 años, apoyó a su madre soltera, y creció con esfuerzo y propósito. Hoy lidera con pasión, urgencia y acción. Su misión es clara: elevar las voces latinas, eliminar barreras y empoderar a la próxima generación a liderar con valentía y compromiso.

West Michigan 25 Most Influential Latinos



View Online



Rafael López

My Roots, My Legacy

México



For over 30 years, Rafael Lopez has made a significant impact in West Michigan by creating hundreds of jobs and helping entire families improve their lives. Through his restaurant, El Caporal, he not only promotes and preserves his culture but also shows his community that success is possible.

Originally from Durango, Mexico, Rafael made the decision to immigrate to the United States more than 30 years ago in search of a better life. He is a humble man who values hard work and supporting others over glamour or fame. Although he did not

have formal education, the values he learned growing up in a small town in the Sierra of Durango have given him the opportunity to build his own businesses and understand that life is about giving back.

Rafael has been one of the pioneers in the local culinary scene, and he feels proud to see the growth of many Latino restaurants in the area today. His dedication to his craft and community continues to inspire others to pursue their dreams and celebrate their heritage through food.

Por más de 30 años, Rafael López ha tenido un impacto significativo en West Michigan al crear cientos de empleos y ayudar a familias enteras a salir adelante. A través de su restaurante El Caporal, no solo promueve y mantiene su cultura, sino que también muestra a su comunidad que es posible alcanzar el éxito.

Originario de Durango, México, Rafael tomó la decisión de emigrar a Estados Unidos hace más de 30 años en busca de una mejor vida. Es una persona humilde que valora el trabajo duro y apoyar a los demás por encima del glamour o la fama.

Aunque no tuvo formación formal, los valores que aprendió en un pequeño pueblo en la sierra de Durango le han dado la oportunidad de construir sus propios negocios y entender que la vida es para aportar a los demás.

Rafael ha sido uno de los pioneros en la gastronomía local, y se siente orgulloso de ver hoy el crecimiento de muchos restaurantes latinos en la zona. Su dedicación a su arte y comunidad continúa inspirando a otros a seguir sus sueños y celebrar su herencia a través de la comida.

LEGACY BUILDER



Thanks to Sponsor 2025

EVENT UNDERWRITER



LA NIMA
PREMIUM TEQUILA
EXPERIENCE



CORPORATE SUPPORTER



BUSINESS CIRCLE

Aguirre Cooper
Family



Maria Marquez

**FB FARM BUREAU
INSURANCE®**



TACOS EL CAPORAL
MEXICAN FOOD

Steelcase



**START
GARDEN**



Hispanic Center
of Western Michigan



#SavingBabiesTogether

VIVE  **MICHIGAN**

www.vivemichigan.com





★ ★ ★ 25 Most Influential Latinos 2023 ★ ★ ★



Ana Ramirez Saenz



Cesar Gonzalez



Liza Alvarez



Evelyn Esparza



Natalia Varel Kovocack



Luis Avila



Milinda Ysasi



Andrea Inostroza



Juanita Bocanegra



Guillermo Cisneros



Daniel Quintanilla



Andres Abreu



Javier Olvera



Camila Noordeloos



Hon. Lupe Ramos Montigny



Omar Cuevas



Ruben Ramos



Griselda Mata



Mercedes Lopez



Mary Martinez



Alejandro Quiroga



Dr. Juan Olivares



Jorge Gonzalez



Reyna Orellana Masko



Raquel Salas Guzman



★ ★ ★ 25 Most Influential Latinos 2024 ★ ★ ★



Alexis Reame



Angelica Velazquez



Carlos Sanchez



Cynthia Martinez



David Castro



Emily Aleman-McAlpine



Evangelina Abundis



Gilda Gely



Gladys Pico



Greg Rios



Jesse M. Bernal



Juan Johnny Rodriguez



Julian Vasquez Heilig



Lea Tobar



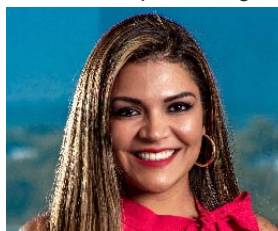
Leticia Perez



Maria Curtis



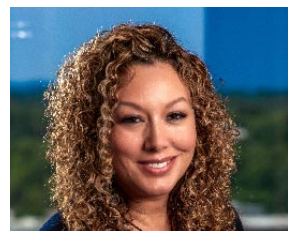
Miguel Morena



Miriam Andrade Cuevas



Robert Alvarez



Rosa Estrada



Ruben Juarez



Salvador Lopez



Solmeris Hernandez



Yadira Garza-Malone



Yuri Vega

What can we do together?

Can we build stronger, healthier communities?

Can we make health better by making it better for everyone?

Can we impact today and inspire tomorrow?

¿Qué podemos hacer juntos?

¿Podemos construir comunidades más fuertes y sanas?

¿Podemos mejorar la salud haciéndola mejor para todos?

¿Podemos impactar hoy e inspirar mañana?

We can.®



Podemos.



Corewell Health™

corewellhealth.org/we-can