

S+B Q+A

WESTERN COLORADO LATINO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Learning from leaders Jorge Pantoja, president; Sonia Gutierrez, vice president; and Amanda Salinas, secretary



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S+B: What is the Western Colorado Latino Chamber of Commerce, and what is its mission?

WCLCC: The Western Colorado Latino Chamber of Commerce (WCLCC) is a membership of Latino-owned businesses in western Colorado. Our mission is to promote the success of our members by facilitating economic and business development, and increasing cultural

awareness. We serve as a portal to our Latino communities, providing a regional voice for Latino businesses, and creating networking and business growth opportunities. We also provide resources like small business advocacy, entrepreneurial support, marketing, training, and ways to promote civic participation and advance cultural and educational relationships.

WCLCC was established in February 2013 by Rich Lopez, along with Louise Goodman, Abel Chavez, Laurie Gomez, Imelda Mulholland, Francisco Cervantes, Mike Archuleta, Martin Moran, Nicole Bernal Ruiz, Jose Lucero, and Danny Sandoval — the Chamber’s inaugural board of directors.

S+B: Why is it important to have a separate chamber that represents our Latino business population?

WCLCC: In the Latino business community here in the Grand Valley, we have found that many small businesses are owned and operated by one of two groups — immigrated residents, or first-generation Latinos born in United States. The differences in how to start a business are quite diverse from these business owners’ home countries. The Latino Chamber helps guide and inform members through the process, while also helping them make connections to the appropriate entities. Whether they are trying to find funding, file the necessary forms, or establish clientele, the chamber is a great resource that not only points members in the right direction but also offers connections, plus information in Spanish to help put them at ease. WCLCC also helps businesses looking to cater to the Latino community make the needed connections while offering insight about this culture.

S+B: What are the chamber’s greatest past successes?

WCLCC: The greatest success for WCLCC is seeing its members succeed. Our priority is our members, and we go the extra mile to help them accomplish their goals. WCLCC has accomplished trust among its members by making these business-to-business connections.

WCLCC also initiated the celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month (HHM) in the city of Grand Junction, receiving the proclamation for HHM from the City Council in 2018.

S+B: What are the chamber’s current priority initiatives, and how do you support your members in accomplishing these?

WCLCC: Current priorities are to continue offering members networking opportunities to grow their businesses. We support our members by sharing information we gather with and from our members. We offer diverse educational/training information. Overall, we work hard to serve as the bridge for and to the Latino community.

S+B: Are there any unique challenges faced by our Hispanic/Latino business community?

WCLCC: Unique challenges are the confusion in our community as to when diversity is beneficial, overcoming stereotypes, funding for startups, and sometimes language barriers. These challenges are not unique to Mesa County but are challenges we see small Latino businesses face throughout the country.

S+B: Colorado’s population is about 21 percent Hispanic, and this demographic represents our state’s largest ethnic minority voting population.* Is part of the chamber’s mission to turn out the Hispanic and Latino vote in western Colorado? If so, how? (*Source: Pew Research Center)

WCLCC: We are not an organization that takes a political stance. However, we do encourage our members to get involved and educated to then vote. We are a neutral organization that would rather inform. Indeed, we invite all political parties to present their information and allow for Q+A sessions for our members and community in general. Our main focus is to help businesses prosper.

S+B: Are there any members, accomplishments, or initiatives you wish to highlight in terms of their importance in our Hispanic/Latino business community, or our business community in general?

WCLCC: We have a great diversity within our membership and take pride in all 120 members’ accomplishments. We keep working towards our number-one goal: helping Latino businesses succeed. +