

Latinx Heritage Month – Highlighting our Dominican Community

“El que no se puede tirar, se jondea.”
(The person who cannot jump in must plunge)
Dominican dicho (saying)

Among the Latinx groups that have made Massachusetts their home, the Dominican community is essential to consider for their move here over a relatively recent period, and for sharing an embrace of the United States with a deep connection to their island homeland. Geographically and historically, the Dominican Republic shares a culture that overlaps with Cuban and Puerto Rican island experiences. In the Dominican experience, their history and culture are also shared on the same island as Haiti, which reflects a rich multi-racial awareness that also comes with the reality of strife emerging from colonization, slavery, and revolution.

The migration of Dominicans to the United States began in earnest in the 1960s, following the assassination of the dictator, Rafael Trujillo, who maintained control over the country for 31 years and led one of the bloodiest regimes in the history of the Americas. During the 1980s, changes to US immigration policies provided greater ease in coming to this country and many Dominicans took advantage of this opportunity. Most Dominicans found new homes in New York, New Jersey, Florida, and Puerto Rico, but a significant number came further to Massachusetts. In 2017, Massachusetts was home to 918,565 Latinos, of whom 167,334, or approximately 18%, are Dominican. Massachusetts has the fourth largest Dominican population in the United States (after New York, New Jersey, and Florida) with members of the community primarily located in Lawrence, Boston, Lynn, Methuen, and Worcester.

One of our CPCS colleagues from the Dominican community is Gisel Pimentel, Business Systems Analyst in our IT Department, whose family came to Massachusetts, via New York, in the late 1980s. Gisel developed a love for computers and technology in her teen years and was well encouraged by her family, and she grew into valuing committing to helping others. She began her career in IT after attending English High in Boston. She was the database administrator for years at a non-profit organization, which she did as she studied Database management at Northeastern.

After 12 years in her role, Gisel decided to make a change and CPCS caught her attention, as “the agency that helps indigent people.” Gisel has grown to lead in our Web Development efforts, particularly on the rollout of Zelly and creation/testing/troubleshooting of other programs in the programming unit, along with providing web management and training on our website. This diversity of experience and our mission keep her invested in our work. Gisel loves her culture, from visiting friends and family in the Dominican Republic to the food and traditions that define who she is and that keep her culture alive.

In Massachusetts, the Dominican experience has unique features that reflect a trajectory that has been historically evident across the Latinx community – starting with grassroots labor and small businesses but expanding well beyond in the decades that followed. This year, the Dominican community celebrated the universally popular induction of former Boston Red Sox David Ortiz into the Baseball Hall of Fame, as a star among countless Dominican ball players who have distinguished themselves across baseball and in their community. We also see Dominicans growing into political and governmental positions within municipalities and our State House. The spirit of the Dominican community is reflected in an innovative, entrepreneurial spirit and hard work that are reshaping our community and Commonwealth.

Unfortunately, there is also a reality of educational need, poverty, and bias that Dominicans experience, the latter coming from a lack of awareness and prejudice, sometimes caused by members of other Latinx communities. These challenges are exacerbated by the youthfulness of the Dominican community, which had a median age of 29 years in 2017 and suffers language barriers as well as low levels of high school graduation or matriculation into higher education. These conditions sometimes lead to the difficult choices some members of this community make that cause them to become our clients, which is painful, but also a key opportunity for us to help and advise these and all our clients in ways that lead to life-changing options. Ultimately, there is strength, vision, and resiliency in the Dominican community that forms a powerful vision toward achievement that can inspire others to jump in or take the plunge referenced in the dicho above.

So, on this 2022 Latinx/ Hispanic Heritage, let us share in this thought – Que viva la República Dominicana y nuestros socios aquí en Massachusetts, con el amor y respeto de toda nuestra familia Latinx! (Long live the Dominican Republic and our

partners here in Massachusetts, with the love and respect of our entire Latinx family and the residents of our state!).

Please enjoy Hispanic/Latinx Heritage Month - 2022, and we have provided some links for reading and event options below.

Events

https://www.google.com/search?q=massachusetts+hispanic+heritage+month+events+2022&rlz=1C1GCEA_enUS868US868&sxsrf=AOaemvLumYBpB2kSpjiWTBVEKztfYrzTg:1630495478945&ei=9mlvYeSQOOyHwbkP86STqAw&oq=massachusetts+hispanic+heritage+month+events+2021&gs_lcp=Cgdnd3Mtd2l6EAMyBQghEJIDMgUIIRCSAzIFCCEQkgMyBQghEJIDMgUIIRCSAzIFCCEQkgM6CggAEecQsAMQyQM6BwgAEecQsAM6CAgAEQCELADOggIIRAWEB0QHkoFCDwSATFKBAhBGAFQyHxYmYUBYJSHAWgBcAB4AIABYYgBpgOSAQE1mAEAoAEBByAELwAEB&sclient=gws-wiz&uact=5&ibp=htl;events&rciv=evn&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjWzK6H1d3yAhX8VzABHdNOAUgQ8eoFKAJ6BAgJEA8#fpstate=tldetail&htivrt=events&htidocid=L2F1dGhvcml0eS9ob3Jpem9uL2NsdXN0ZXJlZmVudC8yMDIyLTEwLTA4fDI4MzYxMjQ3MTY1MzAyNjIwMTA%3D

<https://www.eventbrite.com/d/ma--worcester/latino/>

Further Reading

Latinos in Massachusetts: Dominicans; UMass/Boston – Gaston Institute

https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1251&context=gaston_pubs

Dominicans in Boston; Boston Planning & Development Agency

<http://www.bostonplans.org/getattachment/0c0adc76-aeb3-4f86-91bc-b804681466f3>

GlobalBoston/Dominicans; Global Boston/Boston College

<https://globalboston.bc.edu/index.php/home/ethnic-groups/dominicans/>