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Kansas City Community Development Non-Profit that Assists Hispanic Small Businesses Earns National Award for Exceptional Immigrant Integration Initiatives

WASHINGTON – The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) on Wednesday announced that the Hispanic Economic Development Corporation (HEDC) of Kansas City is one of four recipients of its 2011 *E Pluribus Unum* Prizes for exceptional immigrant integration initiatives. The national award honors HEDC for the outstanding economic development opportunities it has provided to Latino businesses in underdeveloped areas of Kansas City, sparking an urban renewal that has benefited immigrant and native-born communities alike.

HEDC and the other *E Pluribus Unum* Prizes winners will be honored tonight at a ceremony in Washington, D.C., featuring U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and other national policymakers. The national award is accompanied by a \$50,000 prize.

The *E Pluribus Unum* Prizes program, established in 2008 by MPI's [National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy](#) with generous support from the [J.M. Kaplan Fund](#), seeks to encourage the adoption of effective integration practices and inspire others to take on the important work of integrating immigrants and their children so they can join the mainstream of U.S. society.

Since 1993, HEDC has assisted more than 1,100 new immigrant Latino businesses develop in Kansas City – from restaurants and auto repair shops to accounting and architectural design firms. With bilingual business development workshops and other initiatives, HEDC acts as a bridge between immigrant businesses and the receiving community. It assists entrepreneurs from start-up through advising them in matters of regulations, expansion and marketing, and also is directly engaged in the development of blighted properties.

“Hispanic Economic Development Corporation is an exemplary program that showcases the powerful economic results that can come from successful immigrant integration in the business sector,” said MPI Senior Vice President Michael Fix, co-director of MPI’s National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy. “And as immigrant Latino entrepreneurs find their footing and succeed with the help of HEDC, they in turn are demonstrating their power to create jobs and revitalize once-distressed urban areas.”

In Kansas City, HEDC has been lauded by city leaders for encouraging businesses to locate in nontraditional development areas, serving as a springboard for urban renewal and a catalyst for increased interaction between immigrants and the broader community.

“The Hispanic Economic Development Corporation is a transformative program for Kansas City, as new immigrant businesses have brought success not only to themselves and their families but to entire blocks and corridors in our community,” said Kansas City Mayor Semester “Sly” James Jr. “Bernardo Ramirez has used his business smarts and people skills to be a bridge between city government and new immigrants. He has been truly instrumental in bringing new life, new services and new flavors to the streets of downtown K.C., and that has been a boon to all of us who are working to make this a vibrant and prosperous city.”

A recent Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) of Greater Kansas City study found that, in the northeast area of Kansas City, where HEDC is active, more than 30 percent of the previously vacant buildings are today occupied by immigrant businesses.

“Our program, which is bilingual and bicultural, builds support systems for local business owners from inception to mature operation,” said Bernardo Ramirez, the executive director of HEDC. “Just as immigrants to this part of the United States did in earlier waves of migration, today’s Latino entrepreneurs are not only creating and providing jobs in their community, but their businesses and the foot traffic they attract are restoring vitality and a sense of neighborhood to once-desolate downtown areas.”

The program’s recognition comes as the U.S. Census Bureau has attributed the growth of many U.S. cities to a rise in the Hispanic population, with Hispanics accounting for more than half of the population increase during the decade that began in 2000. According to the 2010 Census, Kansas City has grown by 4.1 percent since 2000 (of the city’s 18,000 new residents, 15,000 identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino).

“As recent Census figures show, immigration in the United States is no longer a primarily coastal or southern border phenomenon,” said Margie McHugh, co-director of the National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy. “HEDC’s work in the U.S. heartland demonstrates both the huge payoff that a smart, targeted effort like theirs can have in sparking economic revitalization, and the timeless story told anew of immigrants whose entrepreneurial energy breathes new life into the communities and economies where they settle.”

The other 2011 *E Pluribus Unum* Prize winners, who each receive a \$50,000 award, are: the International Rescue Committee in San Diego, Project SHINE (Students Helping in the Naturalization of Elders) at Temple University and the San Francisco-headquartered Welcome Back Initiative. Marriott International received the first-ever *E Pluribus Unum* Corporate Leadership Award.

HEDC winner highlights can be found at www.integrationawards.org/winners-HEDC.cfm. For more information or to set up interviews, contact Michelle Mittelstadt at 202-266-1910, mmittelstadt@migrationpolicy.org; or Burke Speaker at 202-266-1920, bspeaker@migrationpolicy.org.

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The Migration Policy Institute is an independent, non-partisan think tank in Washington, D.C. dedicated to the study of the movement of people worldwide. MPI provides analysis, development and evaluation of migration and refugee policies at the local, national and international levels.