



Alexei Denissevich, Pheap Phorn and Olinpiu Sabau work on their conversational English at the Center for New Americans. See today's Life & Times section inside for a story on the center and its students.

Recorder/Paul Franz

# Is fear stopping Spanish speakers?

Language center thinks immigration debate may have scared some in community

By **RICHIE DAVIS**  
Recorder Staff

**GREENFIELD** — In English classes here for speakers of other languages, there's probably an under-representation of what's believed to be a fast-growing Latino

community in Franklin County, says the executive director of Northampton-based Center for New Americans.

Probably as a result of the heated debate over U.S. immigration policy, the largely hidden population of Mexicans, Guatemalans and

other Spanish speakers has been lying low, believes James Ayers.

The nonprofit agency offers beginner and intermediate classes in English and computer use for newcomers from a variety of cultures at the Greenfield Community Youth Center, as well as sites in Amherst and Northampton.

"Within that community, there are many people with documentation, as well as some without docu-

mentation, who are understandably much more guarded in connecting with others and talking about their needs," said Ayers. "It makes our ability to do our work more challenging. There's both a lot of anxiety and confusion within the immigrant community as a whole. It includes people with and without documentation."

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# in Bank Row?

Greenfield Redevelopment Authority wants money Bank Row revitalization

By **ANITA FRITZ**  
Recorder Staff

**GREENFIELD** — The town has accumulated \$1.4 million for community development projects, and the agency trying to redeedreptic Bank Row buildings and the Theater would like a big piece of that pie. Greenfield Redevelopment Authority Chairman William Martin said it would great jumpstart to the urban renewal that has been identified by the state and a high priority for Greenfield.

The \$1.4 million is left over from Community Development Block Grant Program from 2005, 2006 and 2007.

"If the town could commit \$390,000 to a year to the project for five years, that be great," said Martin. "If it could \$50,000 to \$60,000 to implement preliminary plans, which would identify which buildings should target first, that would be great."

The authority has been working to number of older buildings on Main Street Bank Row to turn them into a mix of offices and apartments. The plan involves number of renovations and constructi

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# Cremation: A hazard to the living?

Mercury concerns prompt new regulatory limits

# ■ Fear: Detentions increase worries

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Tensions spilled over last March, when immigration officers arrested 300 workers at a New Bedford leather-goods factory, leaving some of their children stranded for hours, as part of an increased crackdown nationwide on illegal immigrants that paralleled an attempt in Congress to find a way to offer citizenship to immigrants who are in this country illegally.

There's no simple way to know how large the Spanish-speaking community is, Ayers said, but it appears to be growing, with concentrations in Turners Falls and Greenfield.

The "Hispanic/Latino (population) of any race" in Turners Falls was 2.6 percent and for Greenfield was 3.5 percent, according to the 2000 U.S. Census — a fraction of the 12.5 percent population for the nation overall, but larger than the 2.0 figure for Franklin County at the time. The 2006 Census estimate was 2.5 percent for Franklin County and 14.8 percent for the nation as a whole.

"When the immigration debate was going on, there was some fear, but also anticipation that something good might happen," Ayers said, "that some of the contradictions in immigration law and policy would be ironed out, but also that the message could be sent on the national level that immigrants are valued, welcomed and an important part of American culture and the work force. When the bill died, it left people very disappointed and feeling anxious."

The Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth, a nonpartisan research organization documented in a 1999 report the significance of immigrant workers to the state's economy — accounting for 82 percent of the labor force growth in the previous decade and a half. If not for foreign immigration, MassINC reported, the state's population would have shrunk in every decade since the 1970s.

Ayers said that he has heard from organizations across the state that regardless of nationality, immigrant groups have been feeling more vulnerable as federal officials seem to have stepped up enforcement efforts and detentions. Even documented aliens, he said, identify with the insecurity that others have felt.

"There's a lot of apprehension around what's the role of local law enforcement," he said. "The waters were muddied when the Romney administration was looking to involve state police in immigration enforcement, which Deval Patrick has since rolled back."

The previous administration's willingness to use police, he said, created the misperception that law enforcement is used as an arm of the federal government rather than a resource that's there to protect everyone's safety.

"Part of what we work with students on, and help them understand, is how law enforcement will react and won't react to various situations," said Ayers, whose organization is involved in citizenship training and also does outreach to help immigrants with housing, jobs and other issues. "We do hear about people who witness crimes and incidents but don't want to call in because they're worried about how police may react. For the most part, I'm very impressed with how local police have handled things, but that perception is out there."

The debate over immigration financially hasn't hurt the agency, which gets 75 to 80 percent of

its budget from federal and state education sources — about \$350,000 — and offers its services for free, according to Ayers. But it does complicate the process of building trust in the community among people who aren't already familiar with its work.

"We've built that trust within various ethnic and language communities," Ayers said. "We'll continue to do that, but it makes that more difficult and more time consuming."

Aside from the importance of Moldovans, Russians, Ukrainians, Southeast Asians, Central Americans and other immigrants to the work force because of a

strong work ethic, Ayers said, "They also come with a fairly realistic sense of how the American dream works. In many ways, it's a dream that's one generation deferred. Our clients talk a lot about coming here so their children can have something better. They realize for them, their economic and social situation isn't likely to change radically overnight."

In fact, he said, many of the nearly 450 immigrants the center typically helps in a year have made sacrifices to come to this country in the belief there will be greater opportunity for their children.

Without expecting to see immediate improvements, he added, their faith in the American dream is "tempered and realistic," Ayers said. "I'm thrilled how much they do believe in it."

■ James Ayers, executive director of the Center for New Americans, said that regardless of nationality, immigrant groups have been feeling more vulnerable as federal officials seem to have stepped up enforcement efforts.

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