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As Latino population grows, MAHUBE-OTWA coordinator is making connections

BY SHANNON GEISEN
Park Rapids Enterprise

One year ago, MAHUBE-OTWA hired a Latino community engagement coordinator to bridge connections



Armando Mendez was hired for that role. His office is based in Detroit Lakes, one of MAHUBE-OTWA's five locations.

"Of course, there's one in Park Rapids. I come there every Wednesday, helping with the Head Start program," he said.

According to MAHUBE-OTWA, 4% of its clients in 2022 identified as Hispanic, Latino or of Spanish origin.

Mendez is seeing more and more of the Latino community move to northern Minnesota.

"In Park Rapids, we have a lot of people from Guatemala. A lot of the parents work at the potato factory, but a lot of them have little kids and they put them in Head Start," Mendez explained. "They do need help with translations. They do need help with communicating what their needs are."

Mendez concentrates his time in Park Rapids and Fergus Falls, but also serves Mahnomen and Wadena. There are smaller populations of Latinos in Long Prairie and Perham, he noted.

Mainly, it's jobs that are attracting them to the area, he said, particularly production line and factory work.

"Things they can see that they are part of something that's being built," Mendez said. "Once they get here, the thing about Latino families is that we stick together. I'm talking about you can have your grandpa, grandma, great-grandpa, great-grandma living with you. That

happens a lot. You have little kids. Everybody spends time together. It's a big community."

Beyond translating, Mendez said he's also been communicating with local businesses and organizations over the past year.

He helped organize this weekend's Día de los Muertos block party, for example, in cooperation with the Giiwediniing Treaty Rights & Cultural Museum.

Many organizations want to help the general public, Mendez said, but they don't have access to the Latino community.

"My goal is to make people aware that there is a need and also try to help fulfill those needs," he said.

Constantly networking, Mendez said if you need an immigration lawyer, he will send you to Legal Services of Minnesota. If you need help with the electric bill this month, Mendez can connect you with MAHUBE-OTWA staff.

"Little things like that. Just communicating with each other. Just working in a big network," he said.

Mendez was born and raised in Monterrey, Mexico, a population of about 6 million.

"About an hour-and-a-half driving from Monterrey to the border of Laredo, Texas," he said.

Being one of the largest cities in Mexico, Mendez said it's popular with tourists. Including surrounding suburbs, he said the population jumps to 16 million people.

In 2004, when he was 25, Mendez applied for a tourist visa to the U.S. and was approved.

When asked what brought him to Minnesota, Mendez joked, "I like to call it brain damage."

"I travel a lot. I'm married to an American citizen. We have lived here in the States, Peru, Colombia, Brazil. We moved for a couple years to New Zealand."

Mendez was previously

MELENDEZ on A5

MAKING NORTHERN MINNESOTA MEMORIES



Alex Haddon / Enterprise

Kim Bowen examines an old photograph in the modern-day lodge.

Akeley owners joke Paul Bunyan died at Crow Wing Crest Lodge

BY ALEX HADDON
Park Rapids Enterprise

Crow Wing Crest Lodge co-owner John Bowen is about 6 feet, 6 inches tall, but likes to tell people he was a mere six feet before drinking the "pure water" of the Crow Wing Lakes, according to his wife and fellow co-owner Kim Bowen.

The Bowens have owned the old resort on the shore of 11th Crow Wing Lake for about 25 years, Kim said. Of the resorts' many owners, they've had it the longest.

The resort, nestled in the woods northeast of Akeley, contains the headwaters of the Crow Wing lakes, a tombstone for Paul Bunyan and a long history.

The Bowens are originally from Iowa, where Kim was a realtor and John worked as a maintenance man and a bus driver. After deciding to



Contributed / Kim Bowen

An old photograph of the lodge at Crow Wing Crest from the early years at the resort. The deer head on the wall has not changed.

Online

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enter the resort industry, the couple spent over three years shopping.

They looked at between 60 and 80 resorts across

Minnesota and Wisconsin before purchasing Crow Wing Crest, Kim said. Her late parents were silent partners.

The couple runs the resort with the help of Kim's stepdaughter, Emily Neely and her husband, Ryan.

It's an "intense" job and the old buildings are a challenge, Kim said.

The lodge was built in 1898.

With a statue of Paul Bunyan at the entrance and a crackling fireplace, the lodge looks almost identical to pictures of it from the 1940s, down to the same ancient deer head on the wall.

The history of Crow Wing Crest Lodge

A patent was filed for the resort's land as early as 1853, Kim said. By the late 1890s, it had turned into one of many area logging camps owned by T.B. Walker and H.C. Akeley.

In 1922, someone named Ray Woods purchased the property and turned it into, Kim suspects, a chicken farm.

She discovered unwelcome proof of this while remodeling cabin No. 6. While renovating, they removed layers and layers of "paneling and

MEMORIES on A2



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INSIDE

Panthers defend title:
Swimmers, divers excel at
Heart O'Lakes Conference
meet.



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Driver injured in deer collision

BY ENTERPRISE STAFF
A Bemidji woman sustained minor injuries in a vehicle-versus-deer crash Oct. 24 in Hubbard County.

According to a report

from the Hubbard County Sheriff’s Office, the incident was reported at 6:59 p.m. near the intersection of 307th Avenue and U.S. Hwy. 2 in Farden Township.

Deputies found a vehicle driven by Elisia Brown, 23, of Bemidji was rendered inoperable in the crash, the report states.

Air bags were deployed

and the occupants, including a 3-year-old child, wore seat belts, the report states.

Don’t forget to ‘fall back’



Alex Haddon / Enterprise

Kim Bowen said after the septic tank was installed under this massive mound, they decided to liven it up with a mock tombstone to the legendary lumberjack Paul Bunyan.

MEMORIES

CONTINUED from A1

funky wallpaper” from the wall behind the sofa in the living room.

“There was this great big window that flapped out,” she said. “On the sill was caked chicken poop and chicken feathers.”

One owner later, Anabel Cairns, also known as “Aunt Polly,” purchased the resort and turned it into a girls’ etiquette camp until 1939.

The property sat empty and unused through WWII. Then, in 1946, Marv and Edna Richmond purchased it and turned it into a resort.

They were a couple of “characters,” Kim said. Edna taught art and ceramics classes, while Marv was a “world champion horseshoe thrower.”

For years, they lived in the lodge, which Kim finds somewhat baffling.

“I walk around all the time like, ‘Where was their bedroom? Where was everything?’” she said

Kim keeps old resort traditions alive, sometimes guided by old photos. In one photo of the Richmonds standing beneath the deer head in the lodge, Marv is wearing a shirt advertising the lodge with a cartoon fish of unidentifiable species. In the back, behind the snack bar, the first few letters of a Heath bar label are visible.

Because of that photo, the lodge always stocks Heath bars and recreated 1950s fish shirts, drawn by Ryan.

Kim keeps letters from old owners, maps and tons of photos in thick albums, preserving bits

of visitors’ history. One image, dated 1948, shows two boys riding in a makeshift pontoon made of airplane fuel tanks. The label identifies them as Tommy and Boyd Wollan.

A picture beside it shows a child, identified as Jim Petersen, sitting miserably at a picnic table. According to Kim, he was upset because he was not allowed to ride in the fuel tank pontoon.

Starting in 1969, the resort changed hands six times, and was even briefly renamed “Loch Ness Lodge” in the ‘70s. The Bowens bought it in 2001.

Traditions built in

The resort’s age has made maintenance a constant project, especially when they discover past owners’ questionable construction decisions,



Alex Haddon / Enterprise

Jim Petersen, pictured here at 4 or 5 years old, was apparently sad because he couldn’t ride the converted fuel tank pontoon, said Kim Bowen.

Kim said.

An example of this was a pine box in a queen bedroom that, for years, had been used as a bed-side table.

“I was always clunking it when I was trying to make the bed,” Kim said. “We were remodeling. We ripped out that queen bedroom, took off the top (of the table) and underneath was a stump. They’d just built around it.”

Although the lodge has its original roof, it was recently covered with a protective layer. Before then, it would take about 40 buckets to catch all the leaks when it rained, Kim said.

To memorialize the resort’s history in a more controlled way, photographs and historical materials decorate every cabin and the tables in

the lodge.

There are tongue-in-cheek decor decisions as well. Akeley’s claim to fame is that it is the birthplace of Paul Bunyan, Kim said, so Crow Wing Crest has his tombstone perched on a massive mound.

The matching tombstone for Babe the Blue Ox is nearby.

“The joke is that he was born there and died there,” Kim said.

Private jokes and small traditions tie the regular customers together, Kim said. One family has been visiting for 74 years. The resort has a steady stream of “looky loos” who visited as children, Kim said.

“It happens all the time. People stop in. They’re just curious, they feel drawn here,” she said. “They had good

memories as a kid and they just want to make sure we’re still here, I think.”

“The repeats would riot” if they discontinued the long tradition of playing bingo in the lodge, Kim said.

Running a resort is never boring, and they meet tons of interesting people, Kim said, but it can be hard to catch a break.

“As soon as you sit down, somebody knocks at the door, texts you,” she said. “It’s inevitable. As you sit down to eat, ding!”

In addition to hosting families, the resort holds relaxation retreats with massage and wellness services, Kim said.

Alex Haddon can be reached at ahaddon@parkrapidsenterprise.com.

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