

Wanting to Be Here

By **Levon Johnson**

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This is the third of ten consecutive articles that I will be writing covering the most frequent topics I have discussed in the first half of 2019.

The Greater Elkhart Chamber of Commerce has a policy statement on immigration that can be found in our Labor Relations Policy. The policy is labeled LR-9. I mention that to put into context the foundation for the rest of this writing.

LR-9 recognizes the law requires companies to hire workers with legal status, however it also points out that for the United States to improve our global competitiveness we need Congress and the Administration, both current and future, to properly revise the work visa programs regardless of jobs being higher or lesser skilled.

Very simply stated, we don't have an immigration problem, we have an immigration policy problem.

In a time where many communities in our country are discussing population stagnation or loss which is leading to labor shortages, there must be policies that allow real solutions to address the issue. Communities, including ours, are investing millions of dollars into attracting people to their area. However, with birthrates as they are and a growing retirement aged population, anyone we attract is causing a hole somewhere else. Don't get me wrong, I am all about Greater Elkhart and there is a part of me that says if another community cannot hold on to their labor pool and we get them here then that's their problem. Somewhere out there another community is saying that same thing about us.

A year and a half ago our business, civic, and community leaders made their voices heard when the very idea of a business that was causing fear and disruption in our area, especially in the immigrant community, was openly and widely rejected.

Full disclosure, we believe the United States is still the land of opportunity. We may not be the best at everything but when you add up the best of everything we are, it's a great reason to be here and want to be here.

Knowing I was writing about this topic, last week I did something I rarely do. I spent time paying great attention to the ethnic backgrounds of the owners of the businesses I visited, both professionally and personally. In just the first three days last week I discovered ethnic backgrounds of Honduran, Guatemalan, Mexican, Nigerian, Indian, Pakistani, Chinese, Laotian, African-American, Italian, German, Polish and Russian business owners right here in Greater Elkhart.

With the exception of a few who are reading this, all of our family trees have roots buried in places outside of the United States. And with the exception of some reading this, our ancestors made the choice to come to this country seeking the best opportunity the world has to offer and for that we should all be proud.

Our very own community has a strength that is made up, in part, by the diversity of our community. The very blanket of Greater Elkhart is made up of very diverse fabrics.

Beyond the politics and focusing on the local level, our neighbors, co-workers, students, and business owners who have immigrated to our region and are a part of our community, with all of their individual unique gifts and talents, help make Greater Elkhart a great place to work, live, and play.

Have a positive and productive week.