

LCCU continues to serve immigrant community

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After nearly 20 years, the Latino Community Credit Union continues to do more than provide North Carolina's Latino community with a safe place to store their earnings.

A credit union founded in Durham in 2000, LCCU works to educate and empower all communities by offering a financial education program and savings, checking, loans and credit services. The credit union's linear organizational structure also forms a clear line of leadership within each department.

"It has been a great journey," said Silvia Rincón, vice president of communications and brand management for LCCU. "We focus on serving the immigrant population, mostly Latinos, but we have gone beyond the Latino community since we identify more with the immigrant experience."

In the late 1990s, North Carolina experienced an influx of Central American immigrants, but once they started working and getting paid in cash, banks were unprepared to serve this community. These individuals became known as "walking ATMs" and were often robbed because they didn't have a safe place to store their money.

"Leaders of the community got tired of this and they reached out to banks," Rincón said. "But banks weren't prepared to serve the immigrant community at the time, so they decided to open their own credit union."

While the LCCU headquarters is located on Morgan Street in Durham, it has 13 branches across North Carolina and around 78,000 members from over 134 countries. LCCU CEO and President Luis Pastor said the credit union has been able to grow because it was needed in the community.

"We've never had to close an office, we've never had to discontinue a program," Pastor said. "We've always been taking steps forward."

Additionally, LCCU offers comprehensive financial education programs twice a year. The classes are facilitated in Spanish by branch managers, and there is a graduation ceremony for those who complete the program every summer. So far, over 21,000 people have participated in the classes.

"When we look at the numbers, we see that the members that participate in the classes are three times more likely to save with us, to use their accounts more wisely, to apply for loans," Rincón said. "So for us, that means that what we're teaching, they're putting into practice. So, that's really valuable."

Pastor said the credit union charges the same rates for all its members, no matter what their credit score may be.



LCCU offers comprehensive financial education programs twice a year. Every summer, the program's students attend a graduation ceremony to celebrate their completion. (Photo courtesy of the CLCCU)

Pastor and Rincón both agreed a fundamental part of LCCU's mission is ensuring that its members trust the credit union. One way they achieve this goal is by providing only what they believe their members need — they currently offer one type of checking account and one type of savings account. They also do not have any paid advertising and instead choose to market themselves through word-of-mouth.

Along with the word-of-mouth approach, LCCU uses social media platforms, like Facebook, to publicize its services. LCCU Marketing and Branding Coordinator Chelsea Contreras said Facebook allows them to connect with those who don't have a nearby branch, so people can follow what LCCU is doing.

Rincón said LCCU is unique since every employee can speak English and Spanish, and they make sure to provide all their financial resources in Spanish. Because of the credit union's bilingual structure, members such as Rosendo Duran Castillo of Durham feel comfortable asking financial questions.

Duran Castillo initially came to the United

States from Mexico and has been a member of LCCU since 2014. He is looking to buy a house and said he appreciates how LCCU is able to work with him in Spanish.

The credit union finances its money back into the community by funding school improvements and arts and culture. LCCU has collaborated with Partners for Youth Opportunity to provide savings accounts for PYO interns. Pastor said these initiatives are important for young people to develop "soft skills" that will help them be comfortable in a work environment.

Rincón said while LCCU would like to expand to the mountains and coast of North Carolina, it is first working to ensure it is adequately serving urban communities. For example, there is only one branch in Raleigh, where there is a need for more.

"We still have a lot of field to cover here," she said. "Every time that we open a branch we think that it's going to alleviate some of the traffic that we have, and what ends up happening is that it attracts people that don't have accounts with us. So, we just keep growing."