

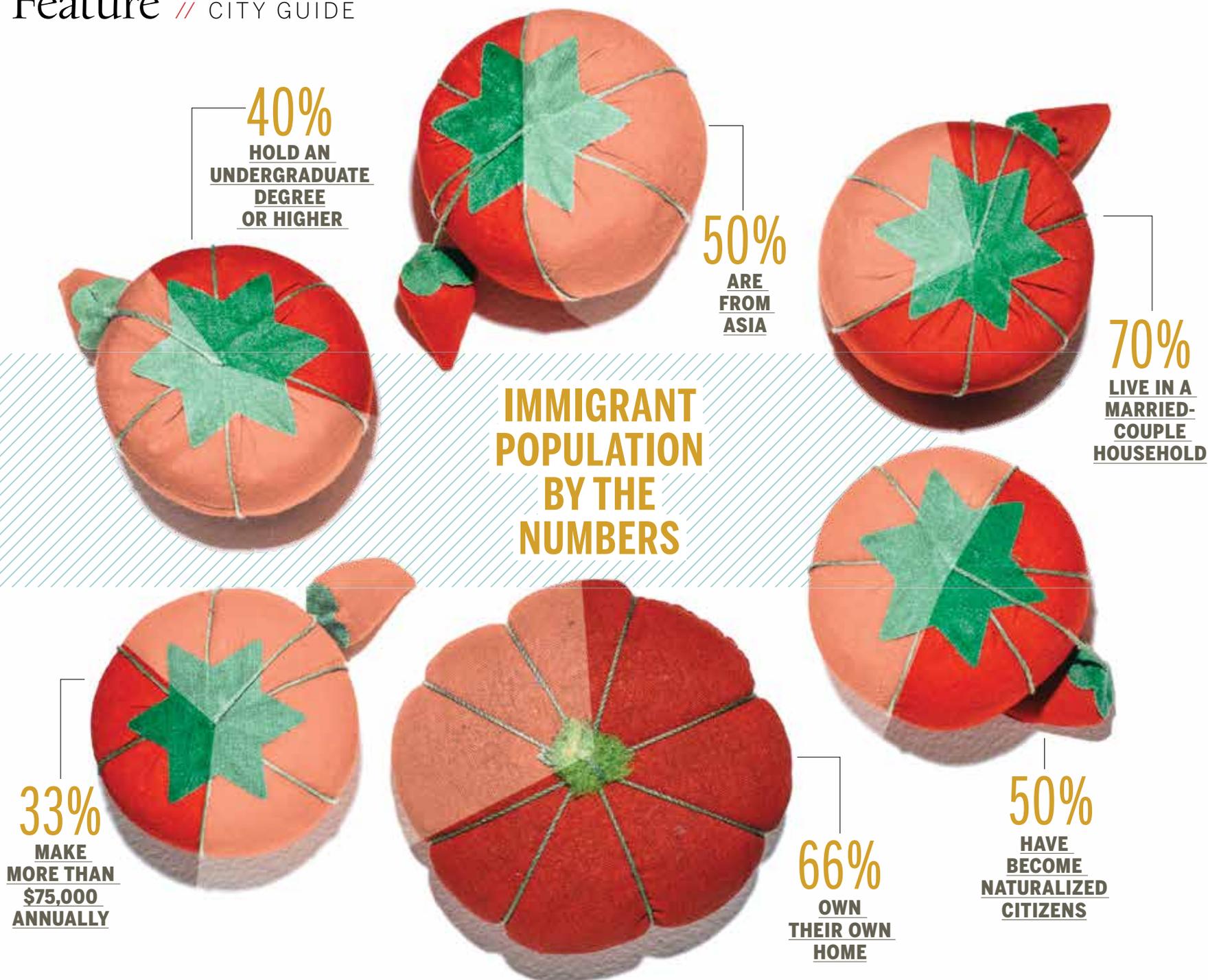




DETROIT'S NEW SOCIAL FABRIC

**METRO AREA STILL ATTRACTS
IMMIGRANTS SEARCHING FOR A
BRIGHTER FUTURE**

BY ALEXA STANARD
ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETER CRAWLEY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROY RITCHIE



//// WE ALL KNOW THE STORY OF MICHIGAN'S POPULATION EXODUS OVER THE PAST DECADE:

Workers and families flee a devastated economy and crushed housing market, leaving homes abandoned in their wake — and leaving cities with shrinking school populations and tax bases.

But there's another, more hopeful, story parallel to the tale of loss: People from around the globe are coming to Michigan in search of a brighter future.

Even as state residents were seeking opportunity elsewhere, a steady stream of immigrants arrived in metro Detroit. Increasingly, these new arrivals are viewed as vital to our region's efforts to revitalize — so long as we can keep them here.

"We tend to think of ourselves as black and white [in metro Detroit]; even within the white population we don't talk about diversity because we keep talking race," says Kurt Metzger, director emeritus of Data Driven Detroit. "I don't think people recognize the tremendous number of countries and the diversity of this region. One thing this region desperately needs is educated young people, and that's more so a characteristic of immigrant groups."

"People are actually choosing this place," he adds. "Let's understand why they have and make sure that we're not losing them."

HISTORIC — AND GROWING — INTERNATIONAL ROOTS

Metro Detroit's international roots run deep. At the beginning of the 20th century, the city had about a quarter of a million residents, more than a third of whom were foreign born. In the coming decades, the auto industry attracted hundreds of thousands of transplants from the U.S. South and around the globe.

Today the region's immigrant rate is 8 percent, lower than the national average of 13 percent. Still, Macomb, Oakland, Wayne, and Washtenaw counties have 397,000 immigrants between them. Furthermore, most residents have a parent, grandparent, or great-grandparent who arrived from abroad.

So who are our foreign born? Here are some key figures, according to a 2014 report by the nonprofit Global Detroit, which drew on the U.S. Census and American Community Survey.

- **ABOUT HALF** of metro Detroit's immigrants are from Asia, but the population is extremely diverse: The top 10 countries of origin (see page 69) make up just 60 percent of total immigrants.
- **NEARLY 40 PERCENT** of metro Detroit's foreign born hold an undergraduate degree or higher (about twice the rate of the native-born population).
- **TWO-THIRDS** own their own home.
- **A THIRD** make more than \$75,000 annually, compared with one-quarter of the native population.
- **MORE THAN 70 PERCENT** of immigrants live in a married-couple household. They are half as likely as the native born to be divorced.
- **JUST OVER HALF** have become naturalized citizens; that figure jumps to 75 percent among those who arrived prior to 1990.

The Global Detroit report concludes: "The fact that more than 75 percent of immigrants who arrived prior to 1990 had attained citizenship... demonstrates a very strong desire for those who take up residency in the United States to become permanent, tax-paying citizens with full legal and voting rights."

CHANGING COMMUNITIES

If you want to get a sense of just how diverse our region really is, spend a day on Ford Road near Schaefer Road in Dearborn. Or walk around Hamtramck, explore Ryan Road in Sterling Heights, or visit Southwest Detroit.

The influx of immigrants to metro Detroit invariably changes the cultural fabric of its communities. A traditionally working-class-white community like Warren now has a mosque. It's possible to walk into restaurants and shops and encounter few fellow patrons who speak English as a first language, or at all. Schools must answer to the demands of parents, especially those from Asian countries, with very high expectations for their children's education.

A handful of communities, forming something of an immigration belt across the region, have received the largest numbers of new arrivals: Sterling Heights, Troy, Warren, Farmington, Novi, Canton, and Ann Arbor.

ONE COMMUNITY'S APPROACH

In Sterling Heights, city officials began to focus on ways to welcome immigrants as early as 1990. The city council formed the Ethnic Community Committee, with the purpose of addressing various ethnic population's issues and concerns.

The committee hosts yearly cultural exchanges and has produced a series of brochures, titled "Getting to Know Your Neighbors," which spotlight different ethnicities.

Then, about a decade ago, the city started an immigrant outreach program following a championship soccer match that was won by an Iraqi team. "There was a huge display of pride and celebration down Ryan Road, and it caught all of us at the city frankly off guard," says Steven Guitar, the city's community relations director. "We didn't know why they were doing that. We realized we needed to form a better partnership with that community, and with others."

The city began reaching out to its schools, churches, fire and police departments, and civic organizations to help them build connections.

Those efforts were prescient, because the city has been among the most rapidly changing communities in metro Detroit. Between 2000 and 2010, Sterling Heights' Asian population jumped 43 percent (that includes a large number of refugees from Iraq and Syria. For demographic/statistical purposes, the Middle East is considered part of Asia). Its black population quadrupled, and its Hispanic population grew by 52 percent.

"The more residents know about one another, the less fear there is, and we find we have much more in common than we have differences," Guitar says. "I think immigration enriches our culture and our quality of life. I won't say it's not without its challenges, but the benefits far outweigh the challenges."

BEYOND BLACK AND WHITE — BUT NOT ENTIRELY

Our region's changing demographics aren't due solely to immigration. Native residents have been doing a fair bit of moving around within the region, too. Younger, educated whites are trickling into Detroit, reversing a decades-long trend of a dwindling white population in the city.

"One of the biggest changes...was this demographic shift out of Detroit, and that was really led by African-Americans more than anyone else," Metzger says. "It's really changed the dynamics in a lot of areas, especially in lower-income communities, mostly along Macomb County's southern tier but also in Hazel Park and Madison Heights to some extent."

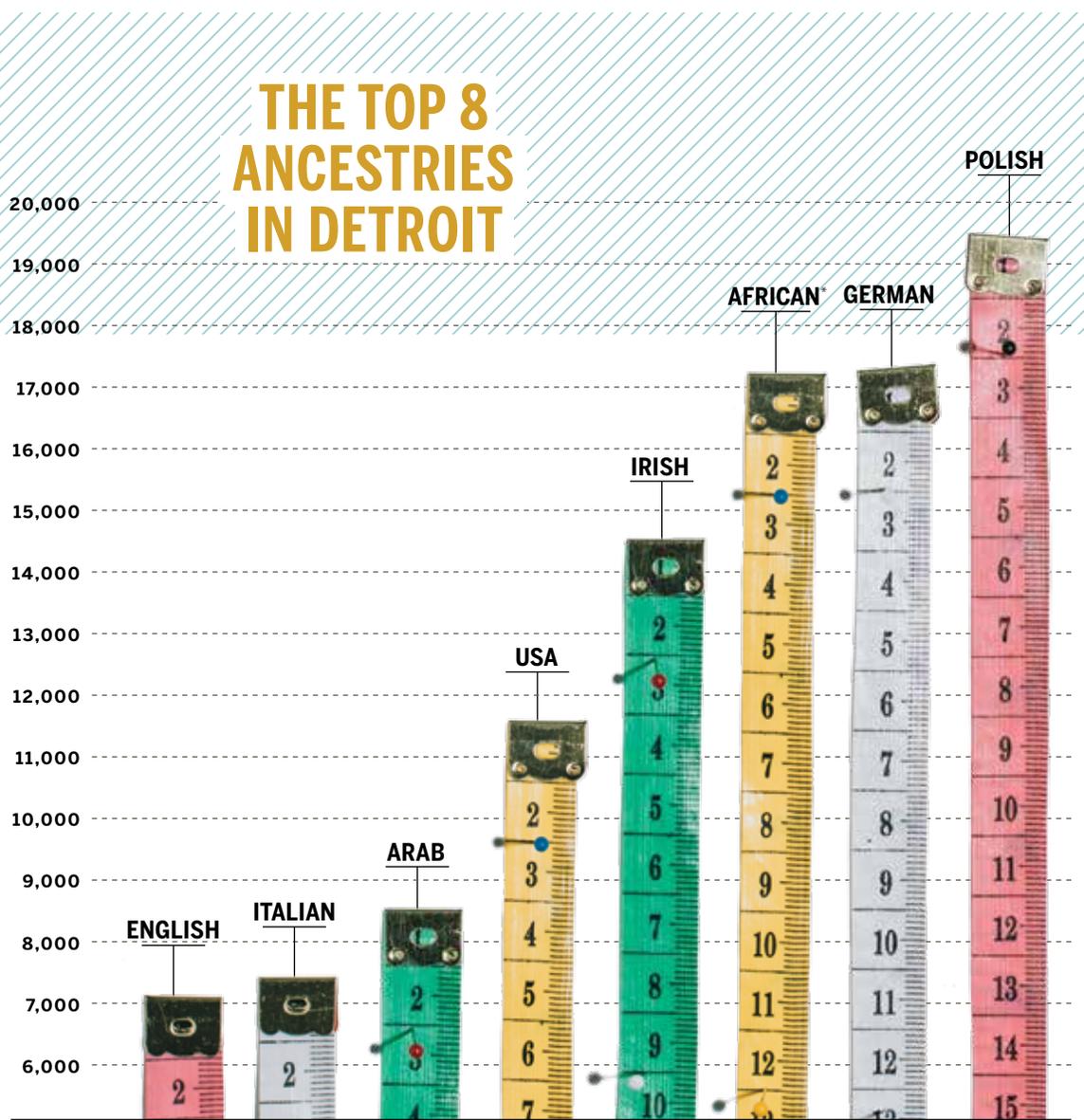
Part of the shift is that established African-American communities in cities like Southfield and Eastpointe absorbed Detroiters who were able to afford housing in those communities for the first time during the economic downturn.

Meanwhile, white transplants to the city have

stirred up resentment among some longtime residents, who see business funding and media attention lapped up by the new arrivals at the perceived expense of those who have long been committed to Detroit.

Such conflict is perhaps an inevitable growing pain in a region experiencing rapid demographic change. In metro Detroit, those challenges are exacerbated by the longtime tendency toward geographical division. But overcoming those divisions offers opportunities for new arrivals and natives alike — and for a region that still has much economic and social progress to make.

"We still seem to be so divided in so many different ways, geographically or by group," Metzger says. "How do we bring all those strengths to the table instead of this constant issue of dividing ourselves? We have pretty good representation of all the major and growing economies in the world, and we should be building those bridges. Let's work with who we already have and become more attractive." ■





COMMON THREAD

GLOBAL DETROIT, OTHERS OUT TO BOOST FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION

BY ALEXA STANARD
ILLUSTRATIONS BY PETER CRAWLEY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROY RITCHIE

//// MUCH OF OUR FOREIGN-BORN POPULATION IS EDUCATED AND ENTREPRENEURIAL.

And since the state needs more people and more jobs, an organization called Global Detroit is out to maximize their potential contributions.

The nonprofit, headed by former state Rep. Steven Tobocman, is dedicated to revitalizing southeast Michigan by making the region more attractive to immigrants and foreign investment. Much of its efforts are grounded in Detroit.

“We know that immigrants are huge urban revitalization engines,” Tobocman says. “If we’re going to have growth, stable neighborhoods, and good-paying jobs, immigration is as important a strategy as you’re going to get.”

“Michiganders talk about needing jobs,” he adds. “There is an undeniable statistical correlation between higher immigration and lower African-American unemployment. The biggest

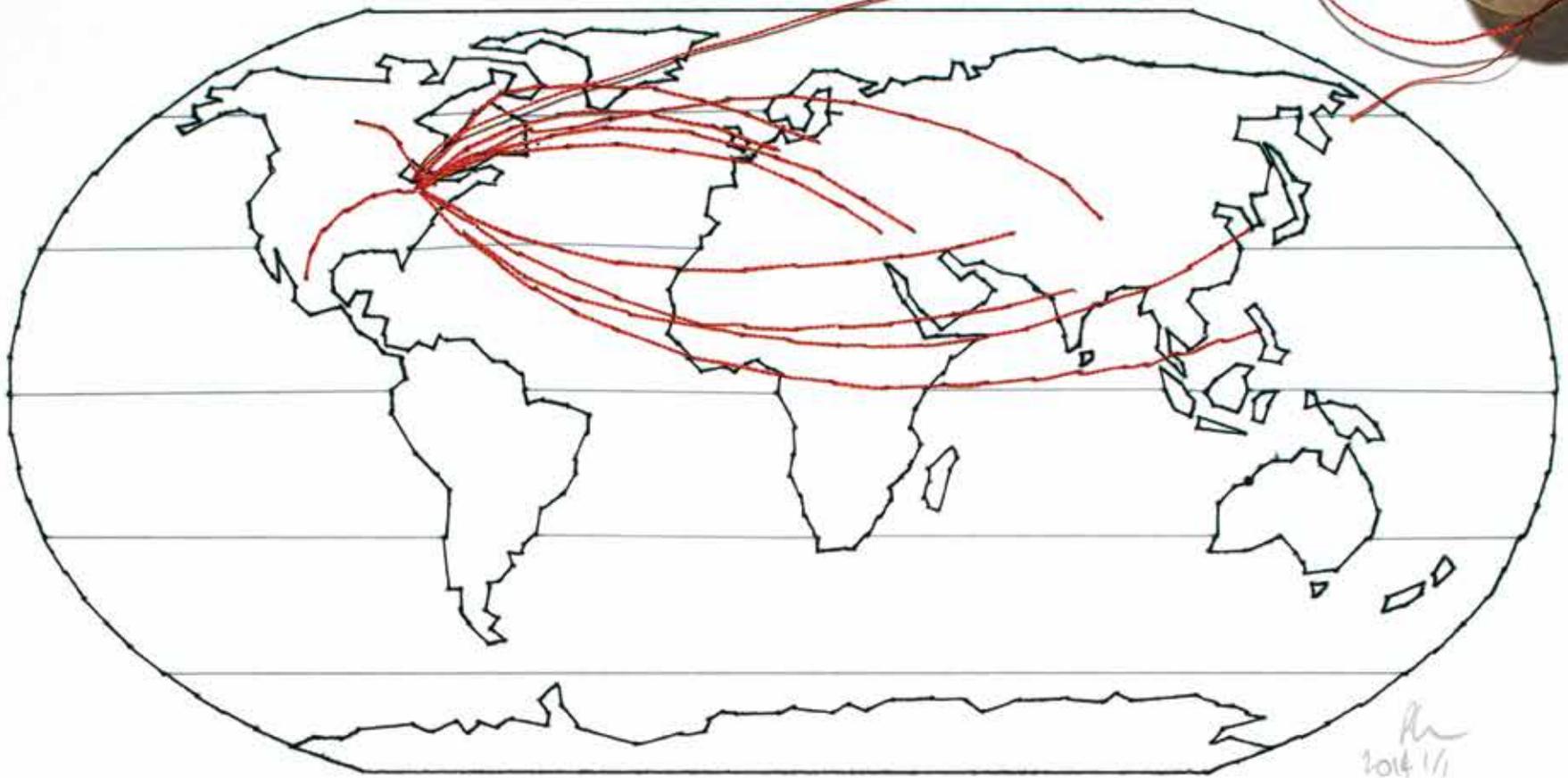
beneficiaries of immigration are the long-term residents of the neighborhoods.”

Michigan’s foreign-born population is especially entrepreneurial. Even though immigrants account for just 6 percent of Michigan’s population, they started one-third of the state’s high-tech firms between 1995 and 2005 (nationally, the figure is one-fourth). A person is six times as likely to start a high-tech firm in Michigan if he or she is foreign born, and at least seven times as likely to file a patent. Michigan immigrants’ entrepreneurship rate is three times the rate of the native born (nationally, it’s two times the rate).

“If we look at cities that have revitalized themselves, immigration is a core component that works,” Tobocman says. “What hasn’t been clear is what does the nonprofit sector do to foster that?”

Global Detroit is one attempt to answer that question. The organization has partnered with a

ATTRACTING GLOBAL TALENT In January, Gov. Rick Snyder established the Office for New Americans to attract talent to Michigan and promote entrepreneurship in immigrant communities. The office is headed by Bing Goei, an immigrant entrepreneur from the Grand Rapids area. It focuses primarily on retaining STEM students and workers and recruiting labor for agricultural jobs (a current worker shortage is forcing some farms to run below capacity, and agriculture is the state’s second-largest industry). The office encourages immigrants to build companies in Michigan, and is making policy recommendations to the governor. The office is also restarting the governor’s Global Michigan initiative, a effort to make the state more welcoming. — *Alexa Stanard*



variety of nonprofit and governmental entities to launch several initiatives.

The largest is ProsperUS Detroit, a 12-week entrepreneurial training program aimed at working-class immigrants and native-born residents. The program partners with community-based organizations in five low-income Detroit neighborhoods to provide a business-planning program.

So far, 140 people have graduated from the program, which also provides small loans for tech assistance and business services like bookkeeping.

Gabriela Ramirez-Darris, one of ProsperUS' trainers in southwest Detroit, leads both English and Spanish-language classes. The program is important for immigrants, she says, whose "language or the job market might be preventing them from working. But they have these abilities that can help them get ahead."

One of her recent students was Sergio Martinez, a 26-year-old who moved to southwest Detroit with his family from Mexico City when he was 5 years old. Martinez, who works as a general manager at a restaurant, plans to open a coffee shop in his neighborhood.

"I grew up where we don't have coffee shops or somewhere we can work or have Wi-Fi," he says. "I want to bring business to Detroit."

Martinez says the ProsperUS Detroit program he attended at a local organization called Bridging Communities has helped his business plan to evolve and changed his perspective by connecting him with like-minded people and opportunities for funding. Immigrants, he notes, don't have established credit in the United States, making it tough to get loans or make large purchases.

"Immigrants don't have the resources that native-born people do," he says. "We have to work for everything, save for everything.

THE TOP 10

The top 10 countries of origin for metro Detroit's foreign-born residents, and the number claiming these nations as the old country, are:

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. INDIA (41,000) | 6. LEBANON (17,800) |
| 2. IRAQ (36,000) | 7. PHILIPPINES (12,700) |
| 3. MEXICO (34,400) | 8. GERMANY (11,600) |
| 4. CANADA (24,300) | 9. KOREA (11,200) |
| 5. CHINA (18,000) | 10. POLAND (11,000) |

"I really, more than anything, want to show that immigrants are productive and useful," he says. "We're good for the community."

OTHER GLOBAL DETROIT INITIATIVES INCLUDE:

- **MICHIGAN GLOBAL TALENT RETENTION INITIATIVE.** More than 60 percent of international students are in STEM (science, technology, and math) fields, and 80 percent have graduate degrees. Most immigrants who have started businesses in the United States first arrived as students. Helping them find employment in Michigan and stay in the state is "the pathway to becoming the Silicon Valley of the Midwest," Tobocman says.
- **WELCOME MAT DETROIT,** a network of groups across the state that offers services like English as a Second Language classes or job training. The network provides an extensive database of resources statewide.
- **WELCOMING MICHIGAN,** part of a national campaign that helps communities identify and implement ways to integrate their immigrant residents.

The Michigan campaign is in five communities (Hamtramck, Macomb, southwest Detroit, Van Buren County, and Sterling Heights). It's the most active among 22 chapters across the country.

- **UPWARDLY GLOBAL,** a national nonprofit that provides online licensing guides aimed at helping work-authorized immigrants navigate Michigan licensing requirements.

EASING THE TRANSITION

Moving to a new country can be overwhelming. In addition to leaving behind family and friends, everything from basic customs and language to transportation must be learned anew.

The International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit helps immigrants achieve self-sufficiency. Founded in 1919, it helps new arrivals gain skills to transition successfully to the United States.

"We're helping immigrants become a viable part of their communities," says Wojciech Zolnowski, the institute's executive director. "We want to have a solid platform so that any immigrant, highly skilled or low skilled, has a place that will help them to adjust."

The institute offers English as a Second Language classes, GED prep, vocational training, financial workshops, and more. It emphasizes acculturation: ESL students, for example, receive a manual giving them assignments such as attending a PTA or community event.

"We help them find a place of worship, the local grocery store — those are the first things," Zolnowski says.

"We're creating this natural integration where immigrants and native residents come together and share their values and culture," Zolnowski says. "We are creating the next Detroit, hopefully an international Detroit." ■