



Immigrants/Refugees to be resettled in Lucas County?

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Bill Hormann

Immigration has become a big political issue in the United States but Lucas County will soon become part of a federal project to resettle immigrants.



Several Ohio cities, Columbus, Dayton, Cleveland, already are officially designated by the US Department of State as resettlement areas. Lucas County believes accepting legal immigrants from other countries will grow the region's population and economy.

Oscar Ponce moved to America from Mexico 25-years ago. He was 16 years old and had nothing. Today, he owns the San Marcos restaurant and market and two other restaurants in Toledo and he's helping other people support their families.

He told 13abc's Bill Hormann, "We probably have about 20-30 employees."

The fierce political debate in this country is over *illegal* immigration. But in places like Iraq, where many locals helped our government in that war, there are people who need to leave their home countries and find places to emigrate.

County Commissioner Pete Gerken (D) says, Lucas County should become one of those official *resettlement* areas. He says the benefits are "Good families, good businesses, diverse community with new experiences for our population and maybe population and wealth growth."

Toledo has a history of welcoming immigrants. Ethnic neighborhoods like the Polish Village along LaGrange street have made our city more interesting and diverse.

Initially, the re-settled immigrants would need help from the social system which would likely include assistance with housing and food stamps. But Gerken says that would only be a temporary hand-up while the immigrants begin building their future here.

Gerken says, "Refugees and immigrants are more likely within two years to start businesses than any other group."

Immigrants like Oscar may be proof of that. Oscar believes *his* success is what others are motivated to find here, as well.

He told 13abc, "We are trying to live a better life that's why we come here; to live a better life."

Thursday, Gerken meets with a group called *Us-Together* which is associated with the state department, to further discuss the resettlement program.

The resettlement program could be launched in 2014 and the first group of resettled refugees could be 30 families from Iraq.