

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

IMMIGRANTS REVIVE RUST BELT CITIES - NEW STORY BOOK CELEBRATES 11 ENTREPRENEURS

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St. Louis, February 18, 2015 – Julio Zegarra-Ballon, a small business owner from St. Louis, Missouri, has been named the \$1,000 prize winner of the “A Day in the Life of an Immigrant Entrepreneur” contest sponsored by the WE Global Network (weglobalnetwork.org), formerly known as the Global Great Lakes Network, in collaboration with New America Media (newamericamedia.org), a national network of ethnic media outlets.

Zegarra-Ballon’s name was selected at random from 11 regional winners in the contest, which gave immigrant entrepreneurs the opportunity to tell their stories of starting their own business in the United States. All of the winning stories, including Zegarra-Ballon’s, are published in a book released today, which can be found on WE Global Network’s website. These 11 stories demonstrate the many ways immigrants are infusing local economies with new businesses and reinvigorating communities.

Originally from Peru, Zegarra-Ballon is owner of Zee Bee Market in the South Grand neighborhood of St. Louis, an international restaurant destination. Zegarra-Ballon renovated a vacant space where he now sells handcrafted and Fair Trade products from around the world, while giving the artisans behind the products a better life.

“Immigrant entrepreneurs are making important contributions in St. Louis, from our nationally renowned start-up community to lifestyle retail businesses. We applaud Julio Zegarra-Ballon and his commitment to making St. Louis a vibrant business community,” says Betsy Cohen, Executive Director of the St. Louis Mosaic Project.

The WE Global Network is a Rust Belt initiative leading immigrant innovation and bringing together local organizations who tap into the local economic opportunities created by immigrants. Local entries were submitted to WE Global Network member organizations in Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Detroit, Lansing, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and St. Louis. The regional winners were selected with input from the local WE Global Network member organizations.

The story contest judging process and prize was made possible as part of grants to the WE Global Network from the Knight Foundation and JM Kaplan Fund.

ABOUT THE WE GLOBAL NETWORK

Over the past four years, initiatives to promote immigration as an economic development opportunity have produced Global Detroit, Vibrant Pittsburgh, GlobalPittsburgh, St. Louis Mosaic Project, Global Cleveland, Welcome Dayton, the

Michigan Office for New Americans, as well as similar economic and community development focused programs emerging in other areas.

The mission of the WE Global Network is to strengthen the work, maximize the impact, and sustain the efforts of local economic and community development initiatives across the region that welcome, retain, and empower immigrant communities as valued contributors to the region's shared prosperity. The WE in the group's name stands for "Welcoming Economies."

The Network, a project of Welcoming America in partnership with Global Detroit, is comprised of over a dozen regional economic development initiatives from across the Midwest working to tap into the economic development opportunities created by immigrants. Immigrant communities, when welcomed in their new home, can generate greater economic growth, job creation, and prosperity for an entire city or region.

For more information about the WE Global Network, go to weglobalnetwork.org, email welcomingeconimesnetwork@gmail.com, find us on facebook at [facebook.com/WENetwork](https://www.facebook.com/WENetwork), or follow us on twitter at [@WENetworkGlobal](https://twitter.com/WENetworkGlobal).

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