

# Ep.3.38 - Roberto Nicolas Vazquez

Tue, Oct 17, 2023 9:46AM 22:44

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mexico, michigan, country, mexican, work, relationship, roberto, consul, people, puerto vallarta, state, visit, live, parts, university, strong, mexican americans, grew, ironed, foreign service

## SPEAKERS

Roberto Nicolas Vazquez, Announcer, Ed Clemente

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- A** Announcer 00:01  
Welcome to The Michigan Opportunity, an economic development podcast featuring candid conversations with business leaders across Michigan. You'll hear firsthand accounts from Michigan business leaders and innovators about how the state is driving job growth and business investment, supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem, building vibrant communities and helping to attract and retain one of the most diverse and significant workforces in the nation.
- E** Ed Clemente 00:29  
Hello, I'm your host, Ed Clemente. We're fortunate to have Roberto Nicholas. He's the consul for Mexico. And thanks again, Roberto, nice to see you all the time. But nice of you to come on the show today. Thanks for being here.
- R** Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 00:42  
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for having me. It's obviously really nice of you to have me here today.
- E** Ed Clemente 00:49  
Yeah, I think people always know what an ambassador is, right? Because they watch TV or movies. From my experience in being around the world, the consul's really do a lot of that groundwork. Why don't you tell people what you do at the consul?
- R** Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 01:06  
Yes, sir. That is common that people get confused between an embassy and consulate. The

embassy, basically an ambassador, has to deal with the relationship between two countries. And it has to go with federal authorities and create links between the authorities of one country to another. The consuls on the other hand, we have to give out services to the people that re from our country, in another country, and also to promote links of understanding, be it cultural links, or economic links, with the with the local authorities and the local actors where the offices are. So basically, it is a relationship that is at a local level. And we have more interaction, given our services to the community, in my case, Mexican community, and as well as doing business, for people that are going to do more studies or something else to Mexico.

E

Ed Clemente 02:23

And I know other states in the United States probably might have local Mexican populations, either in different stages, if they're either becoming a citizen, or they're just here working or whatever. That's always sort of, you know, it's confusing, I think, to the general public, how many people are here, who's here for work? And that's kind of what you help sort out for folks. But, I look at your list here and you notarize documents, I would imagine, that would have to do more with businesses, right? [Yes.] Yeah. Why don't you talk a little bit about business too, because you do pretty unique things with businesses here in Michigan.

R

Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 03:03

Yes. Well, actually, Mexico has a strong, very strong economic relationship with Michigan. It didn't start just in NAFTA. But it started more than 100 years ago. Right when the automotive industry started to boom here in Michigan, saw this connection, it started being a really good relationship with Mexico. So a lot of people from Mexico came at a time to work in the in the auto industry. So we have Mexican Americans that were here in Michigan for more than 100 years. That's why the consul opened 103 years ago, here in Detroit, and through the time, we have developed a strong, very understanding economic relationship with Michigan. We are actually the secondary partner of Michigan after Canada. We traded in 2020 \$71 billion. To put it into perspective, imagine the Gordie Howe Bridge that is building within Windsor and Detroit that after it is build and is finished, it will cost \$5.7 billion. With the amount that Mexico trade with Michigan, they will be able to build 12 bridges like that one in a year. So it is just a perspective for the amount of trade that we have, as well Mexico has in Michigan very good, strong companies that invest here. In those investments we can count Samex, Bimbo, Alfaham, Rassini, Katcon, Nematik, TREMEC. There are a lot of companies that invest here and according to the data, we have this relationship in trade in this industry, it supports over 136,000 jobs in Michigan. So, it is a strong and very mutually beneficial relationship we have. So, apart from the amount that we trade in the in the auto industry, we have a strong relationship in agricultural. So, the current trade with Mexico and agro-industrial products is valued at around six billion dollars annually. And the amount that we buy from Michigan in agro industry, it obviously helps to support 17,000 jobs in the state. So it is not a relationship that is, it is not as visible sometimes, but it is strong. And it is doing a lot of mutually beneficial relationship between our country and the state.

E

Ed Clemente 06:47

Yeah, in fact, I was in the legislature, and I remember us even back then working with the NAFTA parts like there's still parts that we still were ironing out even back then before the

NAFTA parts, like there's still parts that we still were ironing out even back then before the newer one, the 2.0 one. And it was amazing when I heard the numbers of how much that goes, obviously people think Canada because we're closer, but there's a lot we do, obviously with Mexico. And I think a lot of it, honestly, I don't know, you can correct me but the NAFTA 2.0 might even be better somewhat, I think sometimes than parts of the previous one because I think some other things got ironed out during the process, right?

R

Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 07:31

Yes, as you said, the new USMCA obviously, has helped strengthen this relationship after that, the relationship with the United States in general grew and the interchange grew a lot. So, it is very important to underline that this relationship have us now with 33% of what Michigan trades with the world, from all the trade that Michigan has with the world, 33% trades with Mexico. So it is 1/3 of the economy of the state that is done with our country. So that is obviously thanks to the USMCA that helped to improve the supply chain between our countries. And it goes right now very smoothly between interchanges of things in between Michigan and Mexico.

E

Ed Clemente 08:35

I remember the border crossing with the old one wasn't really well ironed out. And I think a lot of that because of it being around since the Clinton administration, I think a lot of those things became opportunities to sort of renegotiate and make it better for both sides or all three sides, I guess in this point, but that's really great to hear. And those numbers are great. I always tell people, Michigan's three biggest economies. Number one is manufacturing. Number two is agriculture. And number three is tourism. And I would imagine Mexico's probably close to those same three right or at least the different states, depending. [Yes.] Yeah, because Mexico I know, the tourism is huge for Mexico. I mean, it's mainly Americans going there too, I think.

R

Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 09:21

Yes, tourism is huge, it's huge. And we're planning on putting, in January and February, a feed from our beaches in Puerto Vallarta here telling, this is how it is right now in Puerto Vallarta, come visit.

E

Ed Clemente 09:40

Is that where you're from? Where are you from? I forgot where you're from. [I'm from Acapulco.] Acapulco. Yeah, I knew it was on the Pacific side.

R

Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 09:46

It's on the Pacific side, as well as Puerto Vallarta, yes.



E

Ed Clemente 09:50

And then you went to school, so you came up I know different countries do it differently. But you're actually someone that went to school to learn how to be in diplomacy. Right or the kind of job of international relations. So you actually work? You go to college or university in Mexico or did you go to Mexico City?

R

Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 10:11

Yes, I went to University of Mexico, it's called ITAM and majoring in international relations and I have a master's in global problem solving. [Interesting.] Yes. So it is actually a specialization that that requires for a foreign service member in Mexico to keep getting up into the ranks as in any respectable foreign service around the world. Yes.

E

Ed Clemente 10:50

Yeah, it's sort of interesting, too, because, I mean, I was just in Europe not too long ago. And I think we have a better system between Canada and the US, you know, and Mexico, than they do even in the EU, because it seems like there's so many sort of like carve outs and confusion as to what you can cross. You know, it's one of the reasons I think, the United Kingdom left because it was getting kind of complex almost too much. I think it's, we're very fortunate to have great neighbors, like you and Canada, because I think it really helps us as an economy. And even where I live, and I think I've told you before, I live Downriver, which is Southside Detroit, Lincoln Park, but Lincoln Park where I live, it's 30% Hispanic, and a lot of my neighbors, like I said, most of my neighbors are from Guadalajara area, or Jalisco, right? [Jalisco. Yes.] Yeah. And so they're really great. And I went to Catholic grade schools, and high schools, and we had a lot of Hispanic kids from Jalisco too where I went to school as well. So it's pretty common, least in my neighborhood, we Italians and Mexican people we're pretty similar.

R

Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 12:08

Yeah, yes. What you are saying is true, it's the footprint of the Mexican diaspora here in the state is long. But also it's growing. And there are a few newcomers. But there are a lot of Mexican Americans living here in Mexicantown. And around. According to our calculations we have in the state of Michigan, around 300,000 Mexicans living in the state. We cover, as well, northern Ohio, and we have another 100,000 down there. So it keeps us busy.

E

Ed Clemente 13:00

Yeah, and even, you know, people think of Mexicantown because we love to eat the food. But you know, we like to shop in the area. I love the bakeries there, too. But on the west side of the state, there's a pretty strong Hispanic population as well, which I don't think people realize. I don't know if it started originally because of agriculture. I'm guessing some of it, I don't know.

R

Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 13:24

Yes, there's a strong Mexican community there. Yes, as you mentioned in agriculture and agricultural activities, but as well as in hospitality and construction. And also in accountants, lawyers, nurses, doctors. It is a huge community in West Michigan.

A

Announcer 13:54

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E

Ed Clemente 14:10

What else? What other big projects are you sort of working on? I know you're probably engaged in, because you go to Ohio, like you said too. Are you mainly visiting businesses? Are you doing, like is there certain projects you guys work on?

R

Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 14:25

We work in a lot of doing business with Mexico seminars. We go around the part that we cover, getting in meetings with business people, as well as getting in touch with local authorities, introducing ourselves, letting them know that we are here and if they have any interaction with any Mexican national that will need some help from part of the consulate. We are here to help. Well, it is actually a really strong job in terms of projects that we have we are. We are building bridges between universities, in Michigan and in Mexico. So they can do interchange of students, as well as the interchange of researchers, that they can visit Mexico, the Mexican researchers can visit the universities here. So it's been a really good project already, we have signed a memorandum of understanding with Oakland University. And we have signed memorandum of understanding with the University of the State of Mexico, which is the third biggest university in our country, with the University of Michigan. So we have really good hope that this relationship gets stronger and stronger, obviously, in the support of both countries.

E

Ed Clemente 16:01

Yeah, in fact, I don't know you probably haven't looked at previous guests. But we have somebody I think you know, Diana Paez. [Yes.] She's with University of Michigan in the William Davidson Institute.

R

Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 16:12

And she's awesome.

E

Ed Clemente 16:13

Yeah, she was a great guest. You might want to listen to her podcast at some point. But she was really great. And she helped tell us a lot about what she's doing for her business.

she was really great. And she helped tell us a lot about what she's doing for iike, business exchanges, entrepreneurship and Mexico. I think it's, I can't remember, she's working with a couple specific states, I thought, but I couldn't remember which ones. But she's great. So, for the future is there any other additional things you think where the world's gonna go for economic development in Mexico? I mean, obviously, I'm sure you're seeing quite a bit of a rebound as some of the more less stable countries are starting to have companies leave it again. So you're having a bit of a rebound as well, I believe in Mexico, right?

R

Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 17:02

Well, yes, we have seen how the political scenario right now and how the supply chain is changing, and re-accommodating so it couldn't be affected by political decisions on an international level. So they are betting on the growing of a stronger relationship between North America, Canada, Mexico, and the United States, working together strengthening our supply chain, so we don't have any distortions like we saw in the pandemic. And obviously, this being helpful for three countries. And we're seeing also a lot of movement in Mexico, Canada, and the United States of companies are coming back nearshoring again, and trying to open new companies or the companies that they have ashore, coming close. So that is what we see in the near future, growing and this relationship, obviously, is getting stronger.

E

Ed Clemente 18:22

Yeah, I would imagine, especially like us, a lot of its in the mobility sector. So as you're either going to electric vehicles or different types of parts for cars, I'm seeing it even in Michigan, let alone the rest of the country. [Right.] I mean, you never know, with other countries, but we seem more stable than maybe the rest of the world sometimes. So it's an incentive for businesses, they rather have stability sometimes than not knowing what's going to happen around the corner. [That's right.] Yeah, no, I'm a fan of globalism. But I mean, I like to see all the countries do well. So it's a tough thing sometimes when they go through struggling. So your last couple of questions, Roberto. One is if you could go back because you had an interesting career and I don't think when you were in high school, you thought you'd be doing what you're doing today, or did you think you'd be doing that? Or if you did, then you don't have to answer this question. But what advice would you give yourself if you're talking to your 17 year old high school self?

R

Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 19:32

Well, I imagined myself doing this, what I'm doing, that's why I love doing what I'm doing. And I will tell myself the same thing I tell to my kids is whatever you do, do it with passion and then you will have success. Once you do it with passion and you will never feel a day that you are working instead you will feel that people's paying you for doing what you like.

E

Ed Clemente 20:04

Yeah, there's nothing better than, you never want to tell your boss, I would do this job for free. But you secretly like to think that right? That's when you know you're in a job you love. So in this this is more of maybe for my benefit but I know, I love Mexico. I think you and I have talked

they've been to like at least 35 pre-Columbian sites throughout Olmecs, Toltecs, Mayans, you know, Aztecs, and what do you like maybe best, you can either give me your favorite spot in Mexico, and what you like so far. You've been here how long now in Michigan?

**R** Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 20:48

Already one year and a half?

**E** Ed Clemente 20:50

Yeah, so, what do you maybe like here too, so give me your favorite spot in Mexico and then what you like so far since you've been in Michigan.

**R** Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 20:56

Well in Mexico, Puerto Vallarta is someplace you have to visit. But it will never be as beautiful as Acapulco. Beautiful. And I recommend it to visit. And from Michigan. You have amazing places all around. But Traverse City is just amazing. And this time of year particularly it's a thing of wonders.

**E** Ed Clemente 21:26

Yeah, you probably don't get too many fall colors. Right? Where you grew up. Do the leaves drop where you're from?

**R** Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 21:36

No, we don't. Fall colors in Mexico we don't have, but what I meant with Traverse City is it's beautiful all year round. It's beautiful in summer, beautiful in the fall.

**E** Ed Clemente 21:47

Oh, yeah. That's a four season city. Yeah,

**R** Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 21:50

Yes. And it's amazing. I love that city.

**E** Ed Clemente 21:56

Well, okay, well, I want to thank again, Roberto Nicholas. He's the Mexican consul here in Detroit. And a SUV that you can see everywhere you're really getting around. you're making a

big impact. And I know I've seen you quite a few times on the circuit and think you're doing a great job and keep up the good work. And thanks for doing this again today. Roberto, we appreciate it very much.

**R** Roberto Nicolas Vazquez 22:19

Thank you, Ed. Thank you.

**E** Ed Clemente 22:20

Join us next week. Our guest is going to be Jill Ferrari. She's the managing partner for Renovare Development.

**A** Announcer 22:27

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