

# Ep.25 - Ray Lozano

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

michigan, folks, community, detroit, area, ed, southwest detroit, detroit area, people, community development corporation, holy redeemer, bridge, business, expressways, home, latino, group, ray, little bit, diverse

## SPEAKERS

Announcer, Ed Clemente, Ray Lozano

- 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 00:28  
Welcome to The Michigan Opportunity brought to you by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. Hello, my name is Ed Clemente. I'm your host today for this podcast. I'm with the MEDC, and today we're very fortunate to have a friend of mine as well as the Executive Director for Mexicantown Community Development Corporation, Ray Lozano. Thanks for being here Ray.
- R** Ray Lozano 00:49  
Thank you Ed. I really appreciate you having me as one of your podcast guests.

E

Ed Clemente 00:54

Well, you have been a good person for the community your whole career. So I think originally we met back when you were on my board at the Chamber of Commerce. And you back then I won't say the name of the company, but let's just say to DTE right now. Yes, well, anyway, let's you know, the Mexicantown Community Development Corporation, why don't you just sort of give us a quick overview of what that is?

R

Ray Lozano 01:22

Sure Ed, you know, the Mexicantown Community Development Corporation is an organization committed to preserving and promoting and enriching the quality of life through cultural activity for folks in the Detroit Metro area, and particularly for Mexicantown in Southwest Detroit. We've been around since 1989, and we have a couple of buildings, a Mexicantown Welcome Center, the Mexicantown Mercado and a big Mexican-style plaza in between. And that was a product of a campaign, that community project was in 2007, it was a \$17 and a half million dollar project to provide retail space and entrepreneurial activity for this community. And if you recall, you know, there are a few communities that were dissected by the expressways in the mid-60s and so this one was a purposely built to try to take care of the business community that dried out during the expressways coming through in the 60s. So, you know, this campus, as we call it, pre-COVID, we have about 4000 people coming through a month. But it's been nearly a trickle since COVID. And, and regarding our project, if I could Ed, I'd really like to thank the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. We participated in one of their public spaces community placescrowdfunding campaigns, and we're the proud recipient of a matching grant from them, a sizable one, so thank you.

E

Ed Clemente 03:01

Yeah, no, in fact, just so people know if they're going on I-75 it's sort of just north, there's a, like a human passenger bridge that goes right to your spot, right when you go under that arch. It's like a it's really a beautiful bridge, actually the passenger one or pedestrian?

R

Ray Lozano 03:20

Yeah, no, there was kind of a like a concession by MDOT to put a bridge. (The) community for 50 years wanted Bagley Avenue and so they could construct that bridge. It's a beautiful bridge. It's based on the the style of Santiago Calatrava, Portuguese architect that's done stuff worldwide and it's beautiful. And Hubert Massey did a couple of art pieces that are alongside the bridge. So folks should check it out.



Ed Clemente 03:48

Yeah, no, no, I love it. I go across it every time I go down and eat in the area. About you a little bit, though, in I know that you grew up actually in southwest Detroit, right.



Ray Lozano 04:00

I did Ed, in fact, my family home was displaced by the by the freeway. Yeah, yeah. You know, but went to school, Holy Redeemer, Wayne State. And so when I worked for the energy company, you know, was proud to also represent Southwest Detroit. So it's been great.



Ed Clemente 04:18

Well, I want to give a quick shout out to Holy Redeemer though, just because I think that's probably one of the most beautiful buildings in Detroit. And if you haven't seen it, is it on, is it on Verner, right?



Ray Lozano 04:31

In Vernon Junction. Yeah. And it's based on the the architecture of the Basilica in Rome. So it's, it's a reproduction of, you know, the structure in Rome.



Ed Clemente 04:41

Yeah. And I know that the fraternity or sorority of graduates to that school stay pretty tight. Unfortunately, the high school close but I know there's still a school there, right?



Ray Lozano 04:52

Yeah, Cristo Rey. Wonderful replacement. That's a charter school and they have a mission of 100% college attainment for kids that graduate from high school.



Ed Clemente 05:03

I just read something about them not too long ago, they did really well in something else I forgot what I saw it in.



Ray Lozano 05:08

They do, the kids work one day a week to help pay for their, you know, their tuition. And then, you know, by working they get some early experience in the in the world of work. So it's a it's a great mission, great structure.

E

Ed Clemente 05:21

I want to get back to you for a little bit. I also knew you pretty well. And when you were President, were you Executive Director or President of the, was it the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, right?

R

Ray Lozano 05:36

Yes, yes. For five years. Sure. Right.

E

Ed Clemente 05:38

And that was statewide, though, correct. So you had members from all over?

R

Ray Lozano 05:43

It is, you know, it's kind of regional. There were a few that were from, you know, further reaches, but the regional metro area, you know, pretty much a collection of automotive supplier folks, people that we're definitely working with the three automotives and automotive related. So not like your typical chamber that you know, where you do a lot for the mom and pops, but more for folks that are in the, you know, the area of providing the supplies and the parts for the auto industry.

E

Ed Clemente 06:18

Yeah. And we both had a good friend there, Frank Lopez, a very active member of your board, as well as my board back then.

R

Ray Lozano 06:27

Yeah, he still goes to the office one day a week. So...

E

Ed Clemente 06:30

I know he's in his 90s. But I love talking to Frank, whenever I get a chance. Also I want to,

you're a Vietnam vet too, I didn't even know that I was reading over your bio, but thanks for your service first of all. (Thank you.) Yeah, in fact, you should also know that there's a traveling Vietnam wall coming, you know, it's going to be around here in the Detroit area. And we just want to make sure that you did a lot with the veterans too, were you on their foundation too, right.

R

Ray Lozano 07:02

Well, yeah, for a while I was trying to help homeless vets obtain some resources and get some housing. So was working for the Michigan Veterans Foundation. They were right downtown in the Cass Corridor for a while when the stadium went up there the the, you know, just a little while ago, they moved out to Grand River and 14th Street, I believe. So, yeah.

E

Ed Clemente 07:30

You've done a lot of really great service, over your career? It's too much to mention. But I mean, and this is one that interested me too, a little bit, just for economic development a little bit. But Ser Metro. I never even knew what it did. But I started reading a little bit about can you explain a little bit what Ser Metro is?

R

Ray Lozano 07:48

Sure Ser Metro is an Employment and Training Organization, and really fortunate to be associated with them. They were a smaller Latino organization that that was based here in southwest Detroit, and it's considerably grown, you know, They have an all female management team, well, not all female, but predominantly, and, you know, they to be in that business of, you know, generating money and being flexible when the rules change and administrations change, and to be able to still provide that service. And it's so valuable. It's just basically putting people back to work again, and so great, great group.

E

Ed Clemente 08:26

And for people not familiar with Southwest Detroit, or Mexicantown or any of that area, what is your sort of working definition when you tell people? What is your area? Like, what is Southwest Detroit? Or it's very, to me, it's kind of a really unique part of Detroit.

R

Ray Lozano 08:43

Yeah, well, my definition might vary from some folks, but you know, to get into Southwest

Detroit, in this area, particular, you have to go under a one of seven, viaducts, and so it encompasses three zip codes for 48209, 10 and 16. And if you, you know, are in this area, you can really pretty much speak Spanish in a lot of the restaurants and businesses. It's estimated that there's probably over 50 restaurants and taquerias and taco trucks. And so it has a lot of history, you know, this has been for decades an immigrant destination for lots of folks that have come here to work with the automotive industry and Ford Motor in particular. And so throughout the years, it's been predominantly Mexican, about 60%, but it's also become Latino and, and Ed I have to throw in, you know, some of the younger folks are now beginning to use the term Latin X. So Latin X kinda is a all encompassing, gender neutral kind of a term that you might begin to hear and so it's more general.

E

Ed Clemente 09:54

Hey, I know that my family were there one time we were over when they first came to the Detroit area from Italy, they went to Lafayette by Springwells. So, yeah, we're familiar with the area too. But you know, let's talk a little bit about some of the other partners that sort of help in that area and the area you just defined, because I know there's a lot of people doing a lot of different activities, what are some of the groups down there you work with too.

R

Ray Lozano 10:20

Sure, no, there's a real litany of folks that are doing things, a lot of them social service related, both Latino and, and those that are non-Latino run, but you know, providing services in this area. I mean, we've got the local neighborhoods, you know, be Gabriel Richard Citizens Group, we've got Hubbard Farms Citizens Group, we've got Congress of Communities, we have the Grace In Action folks. Interesting group that's kind of quasi-religious, but they have some some initiatives, and they put Wi-Fi on some of the buildings in the area when the pandemic hit, so that students could have free Wi-Fi, if they didn't have it through their homes. And so, you know, DHDG, the the Detroit Hispanic Development Group that does a lot with you. And there's just so many the list Ed, you know...

E

Ed Clemente 11:23

No, it's fine. I just want people to understand the tapestry of that community. And that's why it's kind of hard to describe to people, because there are I mean, I know there's a big Yemeni population and one time there was a Romanian population. I don't know if they're still there, but it's changed a lot over time.

- R** Ray Lozano 11:41  
Yeah, Lithuanian, when the school that I went to in grade school was a Lithuanian school. I can sing you a song and Lithuanian too
- E** Ed Clemente 11:48  
Not today, thank you Ray.
- R** Ray Lozano 11:50  
But yeah, no, and Ed, you know, the Italian community a little further west and the Arabic community, you know, bordering us with Dearborn and southwest Detroit, it's been all-inclusive and very diverse and really enriching to grow up in this neighborhood.
- E** Ed Clemente 12:06  
I'd be regretful if I didn't mention the Hungarian community too, that area is all going to be gone soon, right. With the new bridge a little bit.
- R** Ray Lozano 12:15  
Yeah, yeah, that whole area has been displaced. And I know there's still some neighborhoods down down river and but for the most part, I think it's it's, it's really been gone. Yeah.
- E** Ed Clemente 12:27  
I know, it's a long time ago. I I also wanted to ask you a little bit about more stuff, you've already touched on a couple things, but you know, economic development-wise, what is some of the goals for that region? What do you guys because I know they just fixed up the Mexicantown streetscape a little bit.
- R** Ray Lozano 12:45  
Yeah. Yeah. I mean, the city spent about \$5.8 million just doing that they, they got rid of the curbs and put in brick walkways and, and, you know, kind of modified the parking areas. And, you know, it looks great. A friend of mine is an artist is going to be doing an archway over one of the end of the streets. And there's going to be some attractive metal sculptures that are going on some of the light poles. And so it's, you know, but Southwest

Detroit, it's always been very economically vital. When you look at the three zip codes, they continue to add population. They're the only ones that add population to the city of Detroit's numbers. And then, if you look way back to 2000 when the city was struggling to stay over a million, this area through the Coleman Young administration at that point, really worked hard to make sure we, we stayed, we hit that mark. And so you know, this has been a Latino community. And if you look at Michigan, having you know, it's the agricultural industry and the automotive industry and the fact that Michigan is the third largest trading partner with Mexico, there's a lot of connection with this area in Mexico and, you know, the southwest and, you know, the automotive industry in particular. So, lots of connections.

A

**Announcer 14:08**

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E

**Ed Clemente 14:24**

You were also involved a little bit with New Detroit too, and I kind of what is New Detroit? Again, I can you give me a definition of that again?

R

**Ray Lozano 14:31**

Yeah, New Detroit was formed after the, you know, the, the civil disturbance back in 1967. And so, you know, it was community groups, community folks, religious folks and corporate leaders that came together to try to figure out you know, how to improve the city of Detroit's, you know, race picture and so throughout the years it's it's had, you know, different kinds of successes, I think one of the things that's difficult is folks to this day, still have problems talking about race. They'd rather talk about diversity and inclusion and when you talk about diversity inclusion, you're talking about gender and and age. And so it's still kind of shys away from from talking about, you know, black and white issues. So New Detroit likes to keep that focus. You know, they've been around for 50 plus years. So it was a great organization to work with, and really opened my eyes to a lot of things. And one of the things I just had to add is, as a result, a good friend of mine, Ozzi Rivera teaches at Wayne State University, and he does some some classes here for us, and he has enlightened us to our Afro-Latin roots. And if you look at, you know, the US only had about 4% of the slave trade. Whereas, you know, Mexico and Latin America and the islands had 96%, 98%, of, of the slave trade. And so there's a lot of Afro-Latin connections, and so Ozzy and I tried to do some classes here to let folks know about that



heritage, and, and we do it through Afro-Latin music and art. So it's a pleasurable way to bring up the subject, and they begin to talk about race.

E

Ed Clemente 16:26

Right, and now there's a lot of what you do is cultural-related. And then I think that, you know, it's a good fabric to have for that community. Well, we're down to the last few questions, right? You'd be surprised. You, you, you've actually highlighted some of the before I get the last two. But is there any other future things you think people should know about that's coming to the area that you might want to highlight?

R

Ray Lozano 16:51

Yeah, very much so. You know, since Ford bought the Michigan Central Train Station, this area is, you know, having a lot of activity and, and there's a lot more to come. And Michigan Central is creating what's called the Mobility Innovation District. And I'm sure you could go to them to get more details, but they're restoring the Michigan Central Train Station, and that'll be the centerpiece of this district. And they're going to have all these mobility innovators, disruptors, from around the world will be coming there. And they're gonna develop, test and launch, you know, urban transportation kinds of solutions. And, and just recently, I also met some folks associated with them called the New Lab Accessible Street Studio. And it's all young folks with startups, there's about 17 of these startups that are going to be doing their, their business initiatives here in Southwest Detroit, but all around the city, eventually. And so, you know, we're slated to get 2,000 to 3,000 Ford employees over the next three to four years. And so it's going to be a place where all these folks are going to be looking for places to eat, and sleep and play and what have you. And so it's going to really change and it is changing this, you know, when rents have doubled and houses, they couldn't sell for \$20,000 and now going for \$200,000. You know, we had said that we know with the great challenges, you have great opportunities, and we really have a good challenge ahead of us. And I think we're a mature and a skillful community that we can manage the change and have good things come out of it too.

E

Ed Clemente 18:34

The future looks bright for you guys. I hope that goes well. If you could give anyone some advice before, you know, if you can talk to yourself, maybe back in high school, or what would you tell people to do for career wise now?

R

Ray Lozano 18:49

Yeah, you know, I really have a particular angle on that, you know, we all talk about education. But, you know, I think we really need to teach and we have to do things to involve young folks, all folks in critical thinking. You know, the analysis of facts to form judgment. You know, there's so much out there that folks are being fed as truth, that I believe we need to learn to sift through what is being presented and make our own good decisions and reality. And I was watching, you know, CBS recently and there was a program and I really want to, you know, bring that up because there was a young chess player from Philadelphia young man named Justice Williams. And he summarized this idea really well, he's, he's doing his involvement with chess for the inner city. And I kind of paraphrase but he said, 'In life, there's a lot of judgment calls. Just as in chess, you have to make a lot of decisions. You have to learn how to analyze and how to interpret situations to become not the problem, but the solution. There are a lot of options out there. It's about how you choose to make good use of your time.' And so Ed I would tell young folk that. I also have one quick note if I can, you know, if I had to do it all over again, I would have kept a journal. I wouldn't be posting on social media, but I would have written something more personal to myself. Because when I think of all the interesting people like yourself and all the places and all the feelings associated, I often think about my life and I should have taken notes Ed.

E

Ed Clemente 20:26

It's a good point. I, I've kept a journal for most of my life. Yeah. Yeah. I never look at it.

R

Ray Lozano 20:33

But no, but that's good. You know, you might have a book in you Ed.

E

Ed Clemente 20:36

Ah, we'll see. So the last question is, what do you like best about? I know you and your wife Chrissy, you live in Detroit now, but what do you like best about either Michigan or the Detroit area?

R

Ray Lozano 20:49

Well, I've been all over the state. It's, you know, very diverse. I love the fact that this got a quarter of the world's freshwater. But you know, my grandfather brought our family here back in 1916. He traveled with 16 family members to pick sugar beets up near I think was

Mt. Pleasant. And so you know, this is home. A lot of history, a lot of culture, a lot of great friends. You know, I get to travel I get to see other places but Michigan is home. I love it.



Ed Clemente 21:22

Well, you're good guy you always have been Ray and appreciate your service to for the country. And once again, our guest is Ray Lozano. He is the Executive Director of Mexicantown Community Development Corporation. Thanks again Ray for taking time to talk to us today.



Ray Lozano 21:38

Ed, thank you so much, sincerely, appreciate it.



Ed Clemente 21:40

I look forward to seeing you soon.



Ray Lozano 21:41

We will, we'll talk.



Announcer 21:44

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