

Latino businesses deserve a fair share of economic benefits

By Jim Gonzalez

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The great news is that when it comes to soccer in the United States, the city of Sacramento is about to go major league.

The better news is that in the area of Latino business participation in the country, we're tied for ninth, according to the [Stanford Latino Entrepreneurship Initiative](#).

Put those two facts side by side and you would think that Latino businesses should fare just fine when it comes time to awarding building contracts and concession opportunities at the [\\$300 million](#) soccer stadium that will soon rise out of the rail yards north of downtown, just on the other side of the tracks from Alkali Flat.

Unfortunately, this reasonable expectation is not something that can be taken for granted.

All you have to do is [take a stroll around the concourse at the Golden 1 Center](#) to see that Latino owned businesses to date have not fared well in our region's major development projects.

From the perspective of the newly formed Latino Economic Council of Sacramento, it looks like this [\\$558.2 million](#) jewel of the city, and the home of the Kings, threw up an air ball when it came to bringing some of the region's leading local Latino food vendors into the action.

Some of Sacramento's most renowned names in restaurants are serving up their excellent dishes to the region's basketball fans – Selland's, Café Bernardo and Lowbrau, to name a few.

None of the food concessions at the arena, however, are owned by Latinos – despite the roaring popularity of Lisandro Madrigal's Chando's Tacos and Ernesto Delgado's creations at Mayahuel and La Cosecha, to name only a couple of Sacramento's top cuisine impresarios of Hispanic origin.

The story's the same at the [\\$1 billion Terminal B](#) at Sacramento International Airport, where Latino food vendors have been left at the gate.

At the airport, they figured out how to suspend a giant red rabbit from the overhead beams, but they couldn't find a way to get at least one Latino-owned restaurant into their [food concession lineup](#)? Construction and marketing contracts tell the same story.

Under Proposition 209, public institutions are [barred from considering race](#) when it comes to public contracting. But that cannot and will not prevent Latino community leaders from making the case to city and county officials – not to mention the ownership group of the Sacramento Republic FC – when it comes to the construction of the new soccer stadium.

This week, Latino business and community leaders hope to begin an ongoing dialogue with Sac Republic owner Matt Alvarez and its President and COO Ben Gumpert at a meeting convened by Mayor Darrell Steinberg and Vice Mayor Eric Guerra.

We are certain that they want everybody in the city to benefit from all the economic opportunities that the beautiful game will generate locally. It is the international sport, a game that in itself has become a common language for fans from all around the world. That's especially true for Latinos, who have cheered on their own leagues on pitches from Land Park to Fruitridge Road.

Now, we need to strongly engage to make sure proven Latino and Latina owned businesses reap a fair share of the new stadium's regional economic benefits.

Even if cities and counties and the state can't always take action to ensure equity in who gets the work and who gets the contracts, groups like the Sacramento Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Latino Economic Council of Sacramento can prevail against the benign neglect that pervades this issue. And they will.

Jim Gonzalez is a lead organizer of the newly formed Latino Economic Council of Sacramento, a political strategist and a former San Francisco Supervisor.