

Bringing resources to the Hispanic community

By Jessica Kutz, Staff Reporter | Posted: Tuesday, February 21, 2017 5:21 pm

Last June, local organizations came together to form the Latino Advocacy Committee — a group that works to address the needs of the local Latino population.

This year, as the needs of the Hispanic community have become more apparent, a steering committee called the Multicultural Advisory Committee has been created to guide LAC's work and mission.

MAC is comprised of staff from the San Miguel Resource Center, One to One Telluride Mentoring Program, San Miguel and Ouray County Social Services, Uncompahgre Medical Center, the Telluride School District, and officials from Telluride and Mountain Village town councils.

The Montrose-based organization, the Hispanic Affairs Project, also is advising the committee.

The Tri-County Health Network, the lead organizer of the two committees, recently hired an intercultural navigator that will serve as a liaison between the two committees, and also as a point of contact for the Latino community.

Erich Lange, community engagement specialist for TCHNetwork, said the committees were formed when it became apparent there was no central resource for the Latino population.

“A little over a year ago, we recognized that there was no true point organization for the Latino community and that they were still a very much underserved community in our region,” Lange said. “At the same time, we didn't know what was needed in that community.”

This prompted discussion with other organizations in the region to create a formal committee, he said.

MAC's function is to communicate what priorities and needs have been identified on a broader scale in the Latino community. LAC works to connect resources and services — and eventually programming to address those priorities.

“We know there are a lot of gaps in services and this is the way to open the door,” Lange said.

Kody Gerkin, the new intercultural navigator, will take the lead on program development.

A Michigan native, Gerkin worked as a Peace Corps volunteer in rural Guatemala on projects relating to family health after he graduated from college. Upon his return, he completed a master's degree in International Human Rights from the University of Denver.

Gerkin said he will use his experience to address the community's needs here in Telluride.



Kody Gerkin

Kody Gerkin, the new intercultural navigator for the Latino Advocacy Committee and the Multicultural Advisory Committee. (Courtesy photo)

His first priority will be conducting a needs assessment.

“This population has needs and we want to get to the bottom of what those are,” he said. “We will use (the needs assessment) to determine what the most pressing needs are and what kind of assistance is necessary.”

“We will be using these two committees to hash out what should be done so that we can provide this community with the proper tools and resources,” he added.

Gerkin and the two committees currently are working on a resource directory that will provide pertinent information to the Latino population, including contact information for immigration attorneys, housing, education resources, and health and domestic violence organizations.

Lange said the resource directory will be updated quarterly to provide the most up-to-date information.

Although future program initiatives are in the preliminary stages, Lange said the organization is looking to create a legal defense fund that would provide funds to those seeking legal help and a notification system to better coordinate communication across the community.

For more information about the Latino Advisory Committee or the Multicultural Advisory Committee, contact Kody Gerkin by phone at 970-708-0938 or email at inav@tchnetwork.org.