

BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center 30th Anniversary Exhibit

Site Guide

Migrant Present, Migrant Present: 30 Years pays tribute to our nation's migrant farmworkers, to the agricultural enterprises that employ them, and to the Geneseo Migrant Center's 30 years of outreach in service to them.

The exhibit tells the story of migrant farmworkers, their work, and the people who serve them, in a number of ways. Photographs, for the most part by the superbly skilled professional photographers who have been acknowledged previously, document farmworker life and Center programs in striking, often moving, detail. Artwork and poems by migrants tell their own stories in expressively rich visual and verbal images.

Research reports, training models, and instructional materials produced by the Center explain its programs. Posters and interpretive texts provide additional information, context and commentary.

Exhibit panels are organized in sections falling into two major groups. Sections 1 through 7 tell the story of agriculture and farmworkers in our area by decade over the past thirty years.

In each of the Center's three decades, certain ethnic communities have been prominent in the diverse farmworker population. The panels portray their reasons for coming, their experiences on the migrant stream, and the adaptations they make to migrant life. The panels also describe mechanization and other changes in farming which affect the demand for migrant farm labor and the work that migrants do.

Throughout, the viewer is introduced to the human side of migrant farm labor: real people with real histories (individual and collective), real faces and voices that speak to us in their own words.

Sections 8 through 22 tell the story of the Geneseo Migrant Center since its founding in 1968. As the migrant population has changed, so too, necessarily, have the Center's programs. But the central mission remains: in Gloria Mattera's words, to "Let migrant farmworkers live and work with the dignity befitting the importance of their task."

Each major program area is presented in a section, describing research, training, & product development; arts; health; and advocacy. Contents include a description of service programs for migrants at different stages in their life cycle: young children; secondary school youth; young adults, and adults. There is also a summary of the Center's history: milestones of achievement; an overview of its funded program areas; and relations with the College; the wider Community; the State; and the Nation.

1. Section 1 introduces the exhibit's focus on the migrant farmworker population, with photographs and a short text: Since its founding in 1968,

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the Center has recognized: .

...the hard work that often begins for migrant children before they are born...

...the hard work that continues for toddlers and pre-schoolers who still lack daycare facilities...

...the hard work done by school-age children like Juan, work needed for their family's survival...

...the hard work that results in a high dropout rate for migrant youth like David...

...the hard work that begins in the fields for women like Cruz, and must continue at home with care for her family...

...the hard work, making us the best fed nation on earth, that is performed by men and women all too often forgotten by our society.

1968 to 1978: The First Ten Years is in two sections. Section 2 tells the story of migrants, mainly African Americans, coming up from Florida to work on potato farms in Livingston, Steuben, and Wyoming Counties. It describes the technology and organization of the potato harvest in those early years, and the lives of workers in migrant camps. Photographs bring the fields and the camps to life.

Section 3 moves east to Ontario County, to describe the migration by Algonquin Native Canadians from Quebec to work on fur and poultry farms in that area. A mink pen from an operating farm is accompanied by photographs and texts about the work. A farmer's reminiscences and a display of baby carriers recall how Algonquin mothers sometimes brought their babies into the pelting room and hung them in cradles and cradleboards.

Section 4. 1978 to 1988: The Second Ten Years, tracks Haitian refugee "boat people" in the migrant stream from Haiti to Florida to New York. They worked here first in potatoes, later in apples. The symbol of the boat in artwork produced by Haitian migrants represents their ordeal of passage by water, the ties that still bind them to Haiti, and their adaptations to life in America.

Potato farms continued to be the biggest local employers of migrant labor in the 1980s. As the industry mechanized, however, workers moved elsewhere and the farmworker population served by the Center changed.

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Section 5. 1988 to 1998: The Last Ten Years is about Hispanic or Latino (mainly Mexican, Mexican-American, and Central American) farmworkers. They work in vegetable crops and pick apples, mainly in counties to the north and east of Geneseo. The paintings of Juan Cavazos, a migrant worker from Mexico, make a powerful artistic and social statement about the dignity that farmworkers deserve. A panorama by a young farmworker, Monica García, leads into questions of life choices for young farmworkers in the 1990s.

Section 6. Belinda, tells the story of an African American migrant child in the mid 1970s, in words and pictures from a book produced by the Center. Belinda's life and sad death is a cautionary tale, challenging the conscience.

Section 7. Faces, presents portraits of farmworkers in a concluding montage. Poems by African American and Mexican migrants accompany the visual images with voices from the road, the camps, and the fields.

Section 8. Is a tribute to the Center's founder and first director, Dr. Gloria Mattera. Some of the many honors she received in her life of service to migrants are displayed. Her vision of the Center's mission animates Center programs today.

Section 9. Research, Training, & Product Development, shows the three closely related components that support the Center's direct services to farmworkers.

The Migrant Heritage Studies educational resource packages contain teaching activities and supplementary resource materials on the cultural heritage and migrant experience of four ethnic communities: African Americans, Algonquin Native Canadians, Mexican Americans, and Haitians.

Section 10. Arts, describes the Center's arts services: visual and performing arts for migrants (In-Camp instruction, field trips, cultural events) and arts by migrants: folk artists whose work has been identified, documented, and displayed. A timeline lists major exhibits of migrant arts. Profiles of individual migrant artists accompany examples of their art, described in their cultural context.

Health has long been a concern of the Center, in keeping with its tradition of responding to the whole migrant child, youth or adult. In Section 11., texts, photographs, and a First Aid kit depict the health needs of farmworkers and Center programs in health screening, dental care, and health education.

Although Advocacy is not a funded program area, it is inevitably something that service providers do. Working with other migrant service agencies, the Center identifies areas of need that require changes in public policy, including State and Federal law. It has worked with other service providers

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to press for these changes. Section 12., highlights four issues which have had priority in recent advocacy at the State Capital in Albany.

Children are the most vulnerable among the rural poor, as the "Year of the Migrant Child" poster reminds us. Section 13 describes direct educational services in the Center's first decade, in the Children's Demonstration School and programs for preschoolers.

Older youth, in or out of high school, are the focus of the Center's programs on Secondary Education retention (dropout prevention) and dropout reconnection. Henry Lawrence, a migrant who became a professional football player and mentor for young people, is featured.

Adolescents who become Young Adults early on the migrant stream must make hard life choices. They are sometimes torn between traditional gender roles and the challenges and opportunities of the 1990s. Section 15 describes Center outreach on gender, college and career issues. Touching on college opportunities for migrant students, two essays full of strong encouragement, are included which give insight from their unique perspective.

Services for Adults appear Section 16. The education gap afflicts migrant adults as well as children and youth; the need for learning is lifelong in a changing world. The second area, parental assistance programs for family literacy and home-school connections, brings the life cycle around to its beginning: a fair start for migrant children.

Sections 17 through 22 recapitulate the Center's story. A summary of past and present relations to the College, with photographs of former President Robert MacVittie and Dr. William Cotton, is flanked by a timeline of Milestones in the Center's history and a Program Overview showing major funding sources. An overview of the Center's role in the area Community is details its impact in the State and Nation.

As you learn about migrant farmworkers, the farms that employ them, and the many contributions that workers and growers together make to our lives, consider also our responsibilities to them. How can we help to fulfill America's promise for all of its people?

Sue Roark-Calnek
Consulting Scholar