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Interviewer: Today is September 1st, 2017. We're at a restaurant on Southwest Boulevard called Taquería México. And we're talking with the owner, the proprietor, of the business Mr. Arturo Romo. Arturo, thank you for taking the time to visit with me today.

[0:00:30]

Interviewer: Back in 1977, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce started by Hector Barreto and other people from the community and one of the reasons why they started it was because a lot of times the banks didn't have the confidence in Mexican owners, that they would be able to pay back their loans and so forth. And one of the things that the Chamber of Commerce of Greater Kansas City, the Hispanic Chamber tried to do is to help facilitate the growth of businesses.

[0:01:01]

Interviewer: When did you become involved with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce?

Respondent: Well, thank you very much for thinking about [doing] this interview. And one of the things, in 1977 I was not here in Kansas City, I was in probably Mexico or somewhere another place. We come in here to Kansas City in 1992.

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Respondent: And we opened this restaurant in 1993 and is when we know Hector Barreto, Sr.. And he be very accessible for us to open this place in that year because we no really have any opportunities to do business on this city.

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Respondent: So what happened when he know him, we just rented this place from him and he helped us to get a liquor license with his daughter, her name is [Rosa]. Because not any of my brothers and neither me, we no was a citizens, American citizens. When we opened this place he be helping a lot.

[0:02:30]

Respondent: And we go for a couple of years in - I believe, I'm not really sure in three years after we open in this place, we involved in the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, we're part of that. And that was very good for us because we started know more people, more people in the city. We did a lot of [unintelligible] and we participated in that.

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Respondent: In 1997, we was the first small business here in Kansas City. We have a big ad in Kansas City news. So they helped a lot because we know a lot of more people, a lot of people and then opened the big opportunities.

Interviewer: What was Hector Barreto like for those people who didn't know him? What kind of businessman was he?

[0:03:30]

Respondent: Well, he was a wonderful person, he tried to help the people get up on business and he was a business man, he opened restaurants before and then he also get so interested in us, me and my brothers because we come from the same state. He was in some place called Chapala, Jalisco and then we're from Los Altos de Jalisco.

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Respondent: And when we get into that we, you know, we identified very easy because we speak the same language and we very tried a lot - we have a lot of opportunities we were looking for and we were working very hard. And that's what he see in us, that's why he was helping. He said, "You gotta go, you gotta go."

Interviewer: So, after you got started and you began to expand as well, was the Hispanic Chamber helpful in helping you expand to your other locations?

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Respondent: Yeah, part of it. We see the opportunity when we knew the first time we get the - how we can spend it, the business was successful. We get into the Spanish chamber commerce and all the meetings and we pushed them, we have another restaurant and people start coming and people start, you know, talk about the new restaurant.

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Respondent: "They have good food, good service." So they helped us to say, "Okay, we need to open another one." And then the people say, "Why you no open another one in someplace else and over there?" I said, "Well, you need to see, go slow, step by step and open it." We opened one here in - this one is the first restaurant we started and then we opened the second one in Independence Avenue and we opened a third one in Kansas, Armourdale and the fourth one that was in Rainbow, 7th Street.

[0:05:35]

Respondent: We opened other restaurants in El Dorado, Kansas. But besides this, we opened another business in - but there's a lot of help for Spanish Chambers.

We know a lot of people and we started to spread the word and to spread the word and this is how we do this.

Interviewer: So let's say I knew a person coming from Mexico or some other country today.

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Interviewer: Would you recommend that they get involved in the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce?

Respondent: One of the things they need to - when there're people, they have like a vision and they want to get into the business, the first thing is how they're going to open it a business. As part as Chamber of Commerce, they offer to help.

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Respondent: To put in the right direction, with the right people to say, "This is the person, they're going to help you with the license. You need a loan, these are the persons for the bank." Anything, you know, that's the best thing to do if you no have enough where to go. Go to the Spanish Chamber of Commerce and they're going to help you putting the right people in front of you and say, "This is for this and this is for that and what you need to do."

[0:07:01]

Respondent: And I recommend them to do it.

Interviewer: Is there anything I haven't asked you that you'd like to talk about?

Respondent: Like...

Interviewer: Your business or your family. How the transition from Mexico here was. Was it difficult? Was it - did you have relatives here? What brought you to Kansas City?

[0:07:32]

Respondent: Well, there's a long story. My dad, he used to live in Chicago and he spent many years in Chicago and then he go back to Mexico and we grow up in Mexico and he said, "I want my kids no going to work hard where I go." So he - we go into the University, we studied some high school.

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Respondent: And then said, "Well, you know what? We need to move, we need to go someplace else. We no want to be here." So we come here to Kansas City to different states. My brother - one of my brothers spent many years in

Houston, Texas. My other brother, Ricardo, he spent a few years in California and then he moved to Wisconsin and Michigan.

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Respondent: So I started work with my brother Ricardo in Detroit, Michigan - I mean, in Grand Rapids, Michigan. So we had the vision to make a business, to open a business. We didn't want to work like an employee for somebody else all the time so we started saving money. My brother David, he was in Houston, Texas, we're East so we decided to open it.

[0:09:05]

Respondent: We just come here to Kansas City with one of my friends from the hometown too. So we open in this place because we start to get one from there and another from here and we just met here in Kansas City. We opened the first restaurants in [unintelligible] part that was called long time ago in 1992, Los Reyes Restaurant.

[0:09:33]

Respondent: So we decided to open it again. We brought all the family here in Kansas City, my mom, my dad, my sisters and everybody else. We lived all together here in Kansas City and in the beginning we would say, "This is a good place to live. It's a good place to open - there're big opportunities for us." Is why we decided to stay here in Kansas City. Because before, we go to different towns, different states but we decided to stay here for the opportunities.

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Respondent: What they offer. When we started opening here, we met with Hector Barreto, he know a lot of people and then this helps the opportunities opening when we come to the Spanish Chamber Commerce. Hector Barreto, he was the founder and he know a lot of people and said, "This is my friend and this is -" you know, shake hands.

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Respondent: And there was a lot of story but it was very good, yeah. Él nos dirigió con un banquero, con un gerente del banco que estaba en el Downtown y ellos creyeron en nosotros por medio de Hector Barreto que estábamos envueltos en la Hispanic Chamber of Commerce y nos dieron el primer préstamo. [He introduced us to a banker, with a bank manager that was in Downtown and they believed in us Hector Barreto, that we were involved in the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and they gave us the first loan.]

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Respondent: We get the first loan y le compramos este edificio a Hector. Le compramos otro que estaba de aquel lado y empezamos a hacer más negocio pero siempre envueltos en la cámara de comercio. Después de que estuvimos envueltos en eso, [Miguel Meneses] que era el - no, CiCi Rojas que era la presidenta de la Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, me invitaron a mí a ser parte de la mesa directiva. Y... [We get the first loan and we bought that building to Hector. We bought from him another one that was on the other side and we started to do more business but always involved in the Chamber of Commerce. After we were involved in that, [Miguel Meneses], who was the - no, CiCi Rojas, who was the president of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, invited me to be part of the board of directors. And...]

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Interviewer: Can you say that in English? CiCi Rojas...

Respondent: When CiCi Rojas - they have a lot of people work for the Spanish Chamber of Commerce and one lady come in here to ask me if I want to join the mesa directive [board of directors].

Interviewer: The board of directors.

Respondent: The board of directors. So, I said, "Well, I don't know. I need to see -" in that time - if my English is kind of [unintelligible] now - before there was terrible.

[0:12:04]

Respondent: Well, I said okay. I was the first person come from other country and join the board of directors. There was Chicanos, americanos, people that don't speak Spanish. Some people, they speak Spanish but no want to do it in Spanish.

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Respondent: And I said, "Why? If we're the Spanish commerce, we no try to do something in Spanish and bring more people, Latino people that speak good English and they have a good business here in Kansas City to join the board of directors." They said, "Well, we need to find out who need to be coming to do it." I said, "Well, we need to do it because you know, there's a lot of Chicanos. They no know nothing about the Mexican cultures."

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Respondent: "They no know nothing about how is the difference to come from the other country to do business in this country." It's hard, it's very, very hard. So what we need to do is have somebody different experience, then we need to do this. He said, "Okay." So after service for six years I said, "You know what? I think it's time to change, I need to move. Give the opportunity to somebody else."

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Respondent: Right now I believe there's quite a few people in the board of directors on a - people that come from Mexico, some Central America, they are joining the board of directors. It was hard but it was good.

Interviewer: And they have a staff member, [Gabe] que puede hablar el español [who can speak Spanish].

Respondent: Yeah, [Brenda], I don't know if she's still there. Yeah.

Interviewer: [Brenda] también y antes - ahora [Yani], que es Puertorriqueña pero...
[[Brenda] too and before - now [Yani], who is Puerto Rican but...]

Respondent: Yeah.

Interviewer: Y habla bien el español. [And she speaks good Spanish.]

Respondent: After CiCi Rojas there was Miguel Meneses, the president.

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Respondent: When Miguel Meneses, he said, "I want to give the opportunity to somebody else," I voted for Carlos Gomez to be the next president and after a year when he was inside, I moved out. And I have a good relation with everybody there. Every time I go there and - or I saw people somewhere else or - they call me.

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Respondent: Carlos call me many different times to enjoy different people, different customers, different people that come from other country. What we need to do and just talk to see, give them some ideas or something. But we still enjoy those guys. Yeah, there's a - the Spanish Chamber Commerce is good to networking, give you some - a lot of people

Interviewer: [Unintelligible], fantastic.