

Orale Gente, "No More Eric Lee's" the power is in our pockets

By Arturo Vega

includes photos of the Peace Market 2002

I started writing this article before Eric Lee's Bake Shop and Café closed last summer but "things" kept popping up. So with the holidays upon us, I resolved to write this piece not so much for my disdain for the local malls or the Wal-Marts and Targets but to remind myself and others of the economic power that we really do have.

"Bakery Sells Last Scone," was the *San Antonio Express-News*

title for reporting the closing of Eric Lee's Bakery. Eric Lee's Bakery was homegrown and its owner/chef Eric Lee Dromgoole sold everything from turkey avocado and cream cheese sandwiches to muffins and scones. It was located on Martin Street on the near Westside, where his parents and grandparents were raised. Eric Lee's was a place for all kinds of people—business-types had lunch there; would-be poets had poetry slams; the kids from the rec center hung out there; and even people from Alamo Heights and terrible hills flocked for the brunch specials. The closing of Eric Lee's is a tragedy! Moreover, Eric Lee's was part of the community of shops and businesses that we as a community must nurture and patronize.

Our *antepasados* had it right and they were so much smarter than we are today. My *abuelos*, for example, were not educated people but they were *gente inteligente*. I only aspire to be as intelligent as they were. My *abuelo* worked the copper *refinas* in El Paso, while my *abuelita* managed a household of six children. They crossed the border, like many families, during the revolution years in Mexico. They settled in San Elizario, Texas, and eventually, cast their fates in El Paso, "the city."

But their wisdom was one of knowing their power. I remember my *abuelita* making the rounds *de compras* on Saturdays. We would go up and down Alameda Street, stopping at various small businesses and shops. We kids

would complain that everything she needed could be found at the modern and new, Furr's or the Piggly Wiggly Supermarkets (El Paso's versions of HEB and Handy Andy).

We didn't understand it; we considered it inconvenient.

Even when she sent us out on *mandados*, she would tell us to go the corner *tiendita* and ask *la Señora* so and so for *una libra* of whatever it was (*hojas, chile* or *carne molida*). It was never run up to the supermarket or jump in the car and drive to the mall. The same with my *abuelito*. When your car needed work and he couldn't repair it, he knew the *vecino* or the *compadre*, who had a *primo*, who had a *compadre*, who could get us a good deal, if we were patient. But it was the sixties and the seventies and we were all in a hurry, much like today. We wanted

our cars fixed yesterday; we wanted our food fast and we especially didn't want to wait around for our orders or food to be prepared on the spot. Too often, I wish I could relive those days.



When we were kids, even our parents knew the important things that we too often seem to forget today. They knew the community doctors, like Dr. Ruiz, who made home calls, the small business barber, Mr. Portillo, whose kids went with us to

high school, and the owners of the *tiendita* that sold *aguas, helados, sopas* and *tomates*. They personally knew the microenterprisers (that's what we call them today), who made *masa* for *tamales*, the *zapaterías, los mecánicos, y las panaderías*. And we were loyal customers. We would go miles out of our way to patronize a *zapatería* because they knew the owner and he or she belonged to the neighborhood or the parish. They implicitly knew that if they bought goods and services from people in the community then they in turn would take those same dollars and spend them in the same community by patronizing others' goods and services. My parents bought more homemade tamales from *vecinos* than there were *vecinos*, because they knew that next time it might be them selling tamales. More importantly, they knew that for the community to survive that they had to take responsibility for it. It wasn't a passive consumerism; it was economic activism and that was the way it was. They knew that every dollar spent in the community was a dollar that would change hands three or four times over within the community and, again, next time it might be us selling some service or product. Here are the facts, small businesses:

Represent more than 99% of all employers;
Employ 51% of private-sector workers, 51% of workers on public assistance, and 38% of workers in high-tech jobs;
Represent nearly all of the self-employed, which are 7% of the workforce;



Provide two-thirds to three-quarters of the net new jobs;

In addition,

Women are full or part owners of 9 million businesses and the primary owners of 5.4 million;
In 1997 there were 1.2 million Hispanic-owned firms compared to 820,000 African America-owned firms and

913,000 Asian and Pacific-Islander owned firms and 197,300 firms owned by Native and Alaska Native Americans;



Like Eric Lee's, two-thirds survive at least two years; And that 80 percent of all new jobs in America are created by small businesses.ⁱ

Wendell Berry, *In the Presence of Fear*, reminds us that a local economy rests upon two principles:

neighborhood and subsistence. He writes "In a viable neighborhood, neighbors ask themselves what they can do or provide for one another, and they find answers that they and their place can afford. This and nothing else, is the practice of neighborhood. This practice must be, in part, charitable, but it must also be economic, and the economic part must be equitable; there is a significant charity in just prices." (30)

Berry adds that "A viable neighborhood is a community; and a viable community is made up of neighbors who cherish and protect what they have in common. This is the principle of subsistence. A viable community protects its own production capacities. It does not import products that it can produce for itself. And it does not export local products until local needs have been met. A community, if it is to be viable, cannot think of producing solely for export, and it cannot permit importers to use cheaper labor and goods from other places to destroy the local capacity to produce goods that are needed locally. In charity, moreover, it must refuse to import goods that are produced at the cost of human or ecological degradation elsewhere."

In describing the circumstances that caused Eric Lee's to close, the *Express-News* wrote that while it had successes "...there was not enough steady support from those who lived in the neighborhood (to keep it open)." Maybe. And, maybe there wasn't enough steady support from those who live in and outside the neighborhood, too.

Every time an Eric Lee's closes, we need to ask ourselves, what are we doing to help our community's small businesses and

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micro-enterpreneurs. Like Berry reminds us, it's time to stop the large discount stores from using cheap labor costs and goods to destroy the locals' capacities to produce goods and services and subsist economically.

How many times have we wondered where a product came from? Or what history is behind a product? Or who produced it and how it was produced? How often do we think not only about the environmental or ecological costs but the human costs in producing the goods and services we consume? If we're worried about these issues, like we should be, then spending our dollars locally means that we reinvest in our communities instead of the sweat-shops and exploited labor. It's not easy to choose local products nor be conscientious consumers but, like our *antepasados*, let's



remember that a dollar spent in the community is a dollar spent on the community.

What does this mean for all us? Just a reminder. Many already support small and microenterprises. Let's just not forget to get out there and do our part to help the other Eric Lee's. There's no need for Four-Bucks Coffee when you can stop over at Jessica Cerda's *Café Latino* or Suzie García's *Espuma*; instead of Taco Cabana, think of all the homegrown taqueria's, like BJs and *Taco Haven*; instead of Goodyear, check out as the *Wheel Turns* on South Flores; instead of Home Depot, stop at *Esparza's Hardware Store*; instead of Kinkos, there's Munguías or Mr. Pencil or any dozen others; and, instead of the outlet malls, there's the Peace Market and other local cooperatives. In every category of goods and services, our communities have plenty of tailors, dentists, doctors, midwives, laundrys, grocery stores, *carniceros*,

barbers, plumbers, architects, painters, artists, day care providers, *jardineros*, *mecánicos*, *tienditas*, breweries, coffee shops and *zapaterías*.

As Berry reminds us, we can determine and maintain the "character and culture" of our communities. Before we lament the closing of another Eric Lee's, let's protect and patronize the local producers of community goods and services. The power is in our pockets.

ⁱ U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census; Small Business Administration's Office of Advocacy, May 2002.



Arturo Vega is a professor at UTSA.

Community Meetings

Society of Friends Sundays at 10 am at Friends Meeting House, 7052 N. Vandiver, call 945-8456.

ELLAS, Latina Lesbian organization. Call for meetings and information, 210-473-0217.

San Antonio Lambda Students (SALSA) Last Wednesday of each month, 7 pm at the Main Library, 6th floor. Call 732-4300.

San Antonio NOW First Monday of each month at the Resource Ctr, 121 W. Woodlawn. Call Maggie Cronan, 673-8600.

Voice for Animals First Tuesday of each month at 7 pm, Brook Hollow Library, 530 Heimer, call 737-3138.

Parents/Friends of Lesbians/Gays (PFLAG) First Thursday of each month at 7 pm at the Resource Ctr, 121 W. Woodlawn, call 655-2383.

Amnesty International #127 Fourth Thursday of each month at 7:30 pm at Ashbury United Methodist, call 681-8370.

The **peaceCENTER** Tuesdays from 7 – 9 pm for discussion & exploration of nonviolent peacemaking, 1443 S. St. Mary. Call 224-HOPE or <http://www.salsa.net/peace>

Xicana Xicano Education Project Tuesdays at 6 pm at the Bazan Public Library, 2200 W. Commerce St. Call 437-5196.

DIGNITY S.A. holds mass every Sunday at 5:15 pm at St. Ann's Convent, call 735-7191.

Proyecto Hospitalidad Liturgy Thursdays at 7 pm at 325 Courtland, call 736-3579.

Habitat for Humanity holds Volunteer Orientation on first Tuesdays of each month at 1st Presbyterian Church, 404 N. Alamo, at 6 pm.

A Multicultural Worship Service is held Sundays at 11 am at **Spirit of Life Lutheran Church**, call Rev. Kay Johson at 691-5937 in sanctuary of Los Angeles Heights Methodist.

Circle of the Re-Formed Congregation of the Goddess Third Thursday of each month, 7 pm at the Esperanza, 922 San Pedro. Call 822-9105.

Fuerza Unida Third Tuesday of the month at 710 New Laredo Hwy., 7 pm. Call 927-229.

Bexar County Green Party First Sunday of each month at 2 pm at the VIA Transit Center, 1021 San Pedro, across from Esperanza Center.

Notas Y Más

Brief notes to inform **La Voz** readers about events, issues and happenings in the community. Send announcements for **Notas y Más** to: lavo@esperanzacenter.org or by snail mail to: 922 San Pedro, San Antonio, TX 78212. The deadline is the 12th of each month.

The Dallas Poets Community concludes its 2002 reading series with its annual *Moveable Feast*. This year's Feast reaches across the state and draws in writers and performers with a wide variety of talent. The reading will be held Wednesday, December 11th at 7:30 pm at the McKinney Avenue contemporary, located at 3120 McKinney Ave in Dallas. Among the writers presented are Pablo Miguel Martínez and Nancy Membrez of San Antonio. For more information contact: Bob McCranie bob@babmccranie.com or visit the web www.DallasPoets.org

Join the 1st UU Welcoming congregation as they seek to enhance understanding and acceptance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender experiences. *The Common Elements of Oppression* is a forum that will be held on January 12th from 9:30 - 10:30 am and will "kick off" a workshop series. Workshops will be held every 2nd Sunday from 1-3 pm at the 1st Unitarian Universalist Church at 7150 IH-10 West. Call 344-4695 for info.

The National Association of Hispanic Journalists is proud to announce its 2002-2003 *Rubén Salazar Scholarship Fund* competition as well as the NAHJ 2003 convention Internship Program competition. Several scholarships for students pursuing careers in English or Spanish-language print, photo, broadcast or online journalism are offered including: The Newhouse Scholarship Program, The new María Elena Salinas Scholarship Program, The Cristina Saralegui Scholarship Program and The NAHJ Newsroom Bound Program. NAHJ also offers opportunities for students to have internships during the association's 2003 convention at the Marriott Marquis in the Times Square area of New York City which will run from

June 26-28, 2003. Scholarship/internship applications deadline is January 31, 2003. Check www.nahj.org/student/2003/Applica.pdf for applications or www.nahjdigital.org for more information.

Writings or graphic works that reflect the Dominican lesbian identity are being solicited for a new anthology that would be well received among the Latin American and Caribbean Spanish-speaking lesbian and feminist communities as well as in the Latina lesbian, feminist and immigrant worlds in the U.S. The deadline for submission of materials is March 8, 2003. To send submissions or to receive more information, e-mail Jacqueline Jimenez Polanco or Dulce Reyes Bonilla (co-editors) at dominicanlesbook@yahoo.com

Serving can change your life. Looking for dedicated people to help in cooking and serving healthy meals to people who are experiencing homelessness and the working poor. We serve in Milam Park and downtown S.A., two days a week. Call Linda or Joe at 271-3057.

Lumpen continued from page 14 and that we defend Sin Fronteras and the Border Agricultural Workers Center from them. Don't let them tell you different, the facts are clear:

-The lumpen is here to try and destroy more than 20 years of struggle for border agricultural workers.

-They are sent so they can displace workers from their center, and discredit Sin Fronteras; the only group that defends the voice of the migrant farm worker community.

The Truth is that the city cares very

The box and pulley are OUT!

The new elevator is IN!

Do your part to pay it off!

Call 228-0201 to make a one time donation, or sign up for a monthly donor plan...

Let's all pull together!

little about farm workers, and only uses them to achieve its political agenda.



For more information, contact the Centro de los Trabajadores Agrícolas Fronterizos at 201 E. 9th Ave, El Paso, TX 79901, 915.532.0921 fax, 915.532.4822.

The Centro is holding a toy drive for migrant farmworkers and their families. Email sinfront@farmworkers.org to make direct contributions. Locally, come by the Esperanza in San Antonio and drop off donations for Marissa to pick up and they will be delivered to the Centro.