

## Immigrants impress as entrepreneurs and innovators

The Barry M. Portnoy Immigrant Entrepreneur Awards has a long tradition of spotlighting how fortunate we are in Massachusetts to attract ambitious entrepreneurs from around the world. Two hundred and sixty-seven Massachusetts business owners and innovators from 68 countries have been



The ILC Executive Director Vince Rivers, far left, with winners from the 2023 Barry M. Portnoy Immigrant Entrepreneur Awards, from left to right: Son Vo, Wendy Estrella, Isabel Aznarez and Frank van Mierlo.

nominated and recognized for their outstanding accomplishments. On November 8, 2023, we welcomed the latest winners to join this impressive group.

Wendy Estrella, immigrant from the Dominican Republic and founder of Estrella Law and Estrella Enterprises in Lawrence, received the award for Business Growth. Son Vo, immigrant from Vietnam and founder of several restaurants including Chashu Ramen & Izakaya in Worcester, received the award for Neighborhood Business. Frank van Mierlo, immigrant from the Netherlands and founder of Bluefin Robotics and CubicPV in Bedford, received the award for High-Tech Business. Isabel Aznarez, immigrant from Uruguay and founder of Stoke Therapeutics in Bedford, received the award for Life Science Business.



To see short videos of their compelling stories, go to our playlist on YouTube.

## New opportunities open up for The ILC students

Everyone knows that life science is a big part of Boston's economy. For non-scientists, it can be difficult to figure out how to start a career in this booming sector. In March, Lauren Celano, CEO of Propel Careers, presented an overview of careers in life sciences and answered questions for 43 students at The Immigrant Learning Center. The students loved the opportunity to get expert advice on life science career opportunities. Lauren also left behind a wealth of resources for our education and career advisors to add to their toolkit for advising individual The ILC students.

Lauren had offered this presentation many times before, but never to an audience of English language learners. How did we get so lucky? We have been fortunate to have Lauren as a volunteer judge on the selection committee for the Barry M. Portnoy Immigrant



Lauren Celano, CEO of Propel Careers, shares her knowledge of life science careers with The ILC students.

Entrepreneur Awards since 2015. Her knowledge of Massachusetts' life science sector has been invaluable in helping us select winners to represent the immigrant entrepreneurs that make up about one-third of the founders in this sector. Now our students have also benefited from her expertise.

# Meeting teachers where they are

As our supply of resources for educators grows, so does the need to offer them to more people. We have a growing email list, and many educators are finding us on the web, but there's nothing like face-to-face conversations for sharing information and gathering feedback. That's why we travel to conferences across the country and offer presentations about our online resource hub as well as individual lesson plans.

“

**I learned a ton about the history of immigration and really enjoyed the session.**

- Participant at the American Federation of Teachers Conference

So far this fiscal year, we have presented at the American Federation of Teachers conference in Washington DC, the National Council for Social Studies conference in Nashville, the National Council for History Education conference in Cleveland and the Teachers of English to Speaker of Other Languages International convention in Tampa.

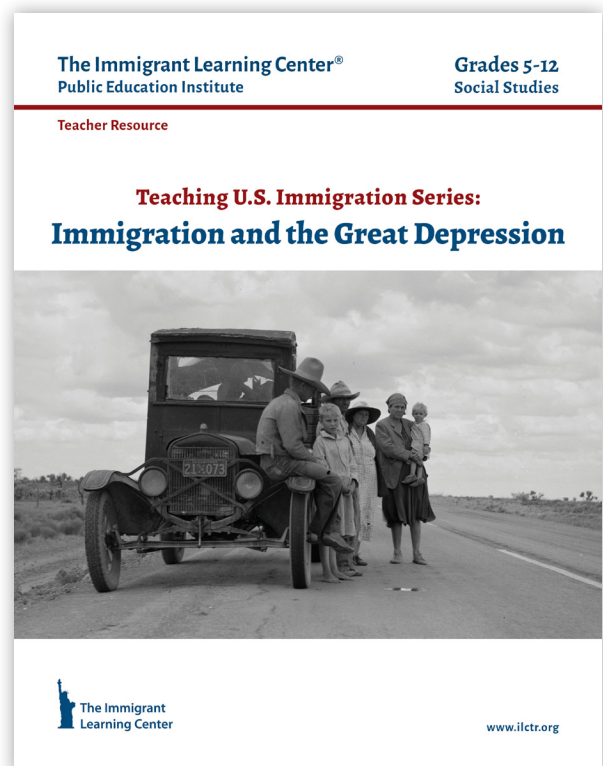
## Immigration and the Great Depression

Did you know that during the Great Depression two million people of Mexican ancestry were forcibly relocated to Mexico, including approximately 1.2 million U.S.-born citizens? This is one of the aspects of the Great Depression that middle and high school students will learn about in the latest addition to The ILC's Teaching U.S. Immigration Series. These lesson plans on Immigration and the Great Depression are made available for free to educators on The Immigrant Learning Center's website and on the popular ShareMyLesson platform from the American Federation of Teachers.



Educators at the National Council for History Education conference consider materials from one of The ILC's Teaching Immigration Series resources: **Immigration and the Civil War**.

Everywhere we went educators told us there is a real demand for resources for incorporating immigration into history and social studies classes. One teacher even told us she emailed her whole social studies department about our lessons during the presentation. The resource hub was likewise well-received.



# Thank you, donors!

It is with our deepest thanks that we recognize the following donors who made financial and in-kind contributions to The ILC between August 3, 2023, to March 30, 2024. Special thanks to our monthly donors, Facebook fundraisers and those who use giving and matching programs through their employers. Please check with your company's HR department for details.

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# Child of former students pays it forward

Lucas describes supporting The Immigrant Learning Center as “the only natural thing to do.” He knows first-hand how transformational The Immigrant Learning Center can be for families. That’s because both of his parents were students, and he knows the significant impact The ILC had on them.



The ILC Founder and CEO Diane Portnoy with Lucas Lemes, son of former The ILC students, at the 2023 Barry M. Portnoy Immigrant Entrepreneur Awards Benefit.

We first encountered Lucas as a child when he came to The ILC family literacy events. We recently saw him again at the Barry M. Portnoy Immigrant Entrepreneur Awards Benefit, and he told us about his family. “When I put myself in their shoes,” he said of his parents “I can’t help but be proud of them.”

His parents left Brazil when he was just six years old. They brought him and his four siblings to start over in Massachusetts with \$500 in their pockets. The initial phase was challenging, with the entire family squeezed into a small apartment in Somerville.

Things started to ease when their English improved. His mother managed to enroll in North Shore Community College and, with much hard work, earned a degree in early childhood development. This was a turning point for their family as she transitioned from cleaning houses and odd jobs to having a fulfilling career and spending more time with the family.

As is so often the case, the success of Lucas’ parents led to success for the entire family. The children are all adults now with their own successful career paths. Lucas is the founder and principal of an insurance brokerage firm, InsurePlus. One of his brothers is an Emmy Award winning editor and photographer. Another brother works in logistics engineering and the third owns a general contracting firm. His sister is an esthetician and makeup artist.

Their story is a testament to the transformative power of education and the enduring spirit of immigrant families.

## Join us !



**THE ILC**  
**GOLF CLASSIC**  
**25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**



**Golf Tournament • Lunch • Reception**  
Monday, June 10, 2024 at Pine Brook Country Club

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# Giving Immigrants a Voice Since 1992

## Not a dress rehearsal, life is better after The ILC

When Aida won a diversity lottery visa in 2017, she was very nervous about the prospect of such a big move, but she said to herself, “I have to stand up for myself. I can start over.” She did start over, with a little help, and is thriving.

Coming from Morocco, English was not one of the four languages she spoke (Amazigh, Arabic, French and Spanish). She coped by using Google to translate on her phone, but she felt lonely and isolated. Everything changed when a friend told her about The Immigrant Learning Center. As Aida described it, “I loved it. It helped me a lot. Here, I felt more comfortable talking with anyone. We were a little family.”

She even surprised herself and her family by participating in the Theater Class. “My sisters couldn’t believe it,” she said. “If you told me I was going to be on stage, I would say ‘no. I can’t’, but I felt so much support. I used to be very shy, but I saw that we are all the same.”

For the past three years, she’s been working in daycare, which is in short supply these days. She loves working with children and is looking for the right location to

open a center of her own. Last year, Aida became a U.S. citizen. If you ask her why, she talks about feeling safe and accepted saying, “I like America. Many cultures, accept everyone. Doesn’t matter where you come from.”

Her husband was also able to join her in this country last year. Now he needs to learn English and has joined the hundreds of others on the waiting list for classes at The Immigrant Learning Center. He’s lucky he has Aida for support. You can help him, and newcomers like him waiting for their success story to start, with a financial contribution to The ILC.



The ILC student Aida (on right) with instructor Sally Nobinger (on left) during rehearsal for theater class.

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