

**“Immigrant Entrepreneurs Can be a Catalyst in
the Future Growth of Staten Island’s Economy”**

Remarks of Jonathan Bowles
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My “Big Idea” to improve the economic climate on Staten Island is: Think Small!

By that, I mean supporting and nurturing small businesses and entrepreneurs. Small businesses aren’t sexy, but this is where the jobs are and where the growth is going to be.

In Staten Island, 81 percent of all businesses have fewer than 10 employees and 93 percent have fewer than 25. Small businesses are now generating 60 to 80 percent of the net new jobs being created in this country.

As part of all this, Staten Island should look at one area in particular where there is abundant opportunity: Immigrant entrepreneurs.

I know that we’re not in Queens, where nearly 50 percent of those living in the borough are foreign born. But the fact is, immigrants are driving a significant share of the population growth on Staten Island, and immigrants are accounting for a significant share of new businesses.

During the 90s, Staten Island’s overall population grew by 17 percent (64,751) but the foreign-born population grew by 63 percent (28,107). In 1990, 11.8 % of Staten Island’s population was foreign-born. In 2000, the share of foreign born in the borough was up to 16.4 percent.

Immigrant entrepreneurs have been a powerful economic engine for New York City, and they’ve brought new life, energy and jobs to neighborhoods all over the five boroughs.

Just look at Brighton Beach, Flushing, Astoria, Jackson Heights, Richmond Hill, Washington Heights. Go to any of these neighborhoods on a Saturday afternoon and they’re jam-packed with shoppers. And there are no empty storefronts in sight.

The same thing is happening just across the Verrazano Bridge, in Bay Ridge and even Bensonhurst. Immigrant businesses there are flourishing.

And it’s starting to happen in Staten Island.

The number of foreign-born individuals on Staten Island who are self-employed increased from 3,500 in 1990 to 5,500 in 2000, a 56 percent jump. That's an increase of 2,000 people who are starting their own businesses. (The number of native-born residents in Staten Island who are self-employed increased as well, but by just 10 percent.)

More than 10 percent of all foreign-born people in Staten Island are self-employed, versus 6 percent of all native-born individuals on the island.

Not surprisingly, retail is the biggest area foreign-born entrepreneurs are going into, but immigrants are also starting businesses in food manufacturing, construction, health care and day care, among other sectors.

So, what can SIEDC and local policymakers do to support this segment of the economy?

1. Make immigrant entrepreneurs a part of your economic development strategy for the borough.
2. Work with entrepreneurs to help them expand their businesses.
3. Reach out to immigrant organizations and community leaders, and look to partner with them on seminars and programs.

Too often, immigrant entrepreneurs simply don't know about the services being offered by local development organizations, business improvement districts, chambers of commerce and other economic development groups.

4. Local government officials can help fund some of these immigrant-based community organizations, which have the credibility and trust to effectively deliver services for immigrant business owners.
5. Bring in groups that target economic development services to immigrant entrepreneurs – like Accion New York, the Business Outreach Center and Trickle Up.