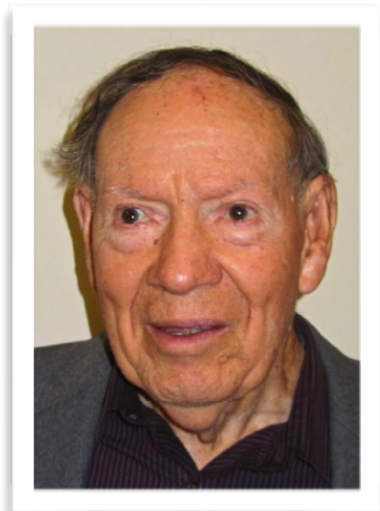


This monthly article highlights one of our branch members. We hope that you enjoy knowing a little more about your fellow members and the interesting life they have had. If you have someone you would like to nominate or if you would like to help author an article, please email the editor, Ron Nakamoto, at [ron.nakamoto\(at\)yahoo.com](mailto:ron.nakamoto@yahoo.com).

Editor's note: Immigration has been a continuing strength for our nation as many of us have traced our first family member(s) that travelled to America seeking a better life and working hard to make it happen. From all walks of life, their contributions perpetuate the success that is America. With a growing nation that needed people and a reputation as "a land of opportunity" immigrants were welcomed and the nation thrived. Fast forward to today, immigration has become a crisis. (In the 1960's immigration averaged 330,000 per year while today it has grown to 1.6 million.) Why a crisis? There are those that argue our nation has more than enough people and available jobs should go to our citizens first. Our resources, social and health welfare should be for our poor and disabled citizens. Others argue that our nation was built from immigrants and they contribute immensely to our creativity and national strength. While the plight of immigrants from the war-torn Middle East and the destitute areas of South America is heart wrenching, our national response remains unclear as to champion "open borders" or "build the wall". What to do? Here is a fellow member's immigrant story, the path he took, and the contribution he and his family made to America as told by his son, Gabriel, also a Branch 35 SIR member.

MICHAEL IBARRA



“Michael Ibarra was born in Guadalajara, Mexico. He was the youngest of four siblings and raised by his grandparents as his parents were working to support the family. His Grandfather Santiago and Grandmother Monica owned and ran a general store and sold merchandise in bulk. When Michael was seven, he started to work helping out in the family store during the day and going to school in the evenings. He showed a determination to contribute and make his own way in life at an early age and kept this schedule until he graduated from high school. He walked over four miles every day on dirt roads, to school and back. He showed his enterprising spirit, selling vegetables his Mom grew in her garden. In high school, he had a gig where he would buy or rent 16mm movies and show it to the various neighborhoods, using a bed sheet as a screen. He charged about 50

centavos and usually had about 100 people attending. The patrons were thankful and happy for the evening of entertainment that Michael would provide. He gave his earnings to the family as he was happy to help out where he could. After he graduated from high school, he tried his hand at sales for a shoe shop. He did well and after two

years, was to become a supervisor for the shop. Unfortunately, a co-worker was stealing money and equipment from the shop and it eventually closed. When Michael was about 18 years of age, his Mom passed away. He was saddened and decided to leave Guadalajara for a small town called Tlacuitalpa. Small towns still had schools for their children and Michael became a schoolteacher teaching the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. He taught at the high school in the mornings and adult school in the evenings. Unfortunately, the pay was not enough to sustain him so after a year he decided to try his luck in America.

“At the age of 19, Michael was able to secure a visa and travelled to Idaho and later, Washington State doing whatever jobs he could find at the time. He moved to Sunnyvale because the other states were too cold for him. In Sunnyvale he found the more Mediterranean-like climate to his liking. He worked for Mr. Losse, driving the workers to and from the job site. *(Editor’s note: The Losse Bros. owned the largest apricot orchard in the state and in addition grew peaches, pears, prunes and cherries.)* He also drove Mrs. Losse to her charitable functions using her mauve, twelve cylinders, Lincoln 1949 Coupe, which was in mint condition. When she bought another car, she noted how well Michael took care of her car and offered to sell it to him. He immediately bought it and drove it everywhere. Michael loved America and enjoyed the fruits of his hard work.

“He moved onto Schuckel’s Cannery in Sunnyvale as a mechanic’s helper, greasing all the machines. Being single, he saved enough money to go back to visit Guadalajara in the spring of 1952 where his two sisters still resided. With almost \$5,000 in his pocket he ran into some bad luck when two men robbed him while he was waiting for his train in San Francisco. While he was devastated he made up his mind to make the trip so he put the experience behind him and continued on his journey with some borrowed money.

“Once in Guadalajara, he went back to his parish and looked up his friends. He found out that everyone was looking forward to a fundraiser for the Red Cross, a first annual for the parish to be held at the local Parque de Revolution. There were food booths that featured food from around the world, games of chance, and music. My Dad always liked to dress up so he put on his suit and tie for the occasion. As he strolled around the circular park, he saw a beautiful girl with her friends. She could have been a model, with blue eyes, a fair complexion and an aura of mystery. He introduced himself to Teresa Ramos. Michael was smitten. Within one month of courting, he returned to Sunnyvale to work hard to make more money, as he knew that she was the perfect woman for him. One year later, he was married in



Guadalajara and they honeymooned in Hermosillo, Mexico, a fairly large city with many attractions.

“The newlyweds moved to Santa Clara to his new job at Pемline, the largest employer in Santa Clara in 1953 making kitchen cabinets. Business and life was fine for awhile until a relative of the owner took over the company and ran it into the ground. The company filed for bankruptcy and with a growing family (5 kids through the course of twelve years) Michael needed to find a new career again. He joined the Carpenters Union and took an accelerated course in carpentry through the Union becoming a certified carpenter. He also, concurrently took English classes at Fremont High School at night. He became a U.S. Citizen in 1966. Michael worked tirelessly with many local companies framing homes, building kitchen cabinets and other carpentry work helping build up the Sunnyvale and Santa Clara areas. My Dad retired as a union carpenter and started his own business customizing picture frames and selling his products throughout the San Francisco and San Jose markets. As a small business he was living the American dream until 2001, when the internet boom and the lack of trade protection made it easy for China to flood the market with picture frames at a fraction of the cost.

“My Mom and Dad devoted their lives to their children and church. They were founding members (1959) of St. Lawrence Church, Santa Clara. As a founding member he donated three percent of his income every month, served as an usher and did other special tasks as required. He created frames for all the special occasions and was a key contributor to the construction of a new, larger church. My Mom served in the Ladies Guild and the Altar Society. We were all able to attend school there because of the hard work my Mom did in Libby’s Cannery during the summer. We attended the local high school and colleges. My Dad was instrumental in encouraging all the kids to pursue an education and contribute back to their community.

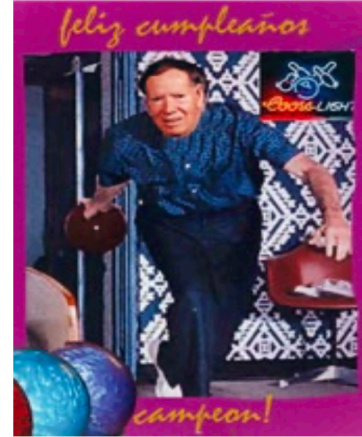
“I think he succeeded with this encouragement: -- my sister Elvira is a bilingual education teacher, going on thirteen years. She gives everything to inspire and move these kids forward. My other sister Monica is a teacher, for special needs children. She tries to reach each child at their own level, devoting time and energy so that they can reach their full potential. My brothers Michael Jr. and Rafael both work for the Valley Transportation Authority as a supervisor/mechanic and parts supervisor. Working in the service sector, they both try to do their best to keep the buses running on time to service the many subscribers and handicapped. As for me, Gabriel, I’ve worked as a Buyer Planner in the high tech industry for twenty years. I now teach at a local high school as a tennis coach and have taught thousands of students, with ‘Love, Pride, and Knowledge’.

“Michael still maintains his frame shop at home which he uses to make frames for friends and family. His most creative frame was a double frame and triple mat, which he did for a friend’s daughter. It took my Dad three weeks to complete it.

“My dad prides himself in keeping his home in primo shape. With his spare time he went back to school at West Valley College to learn about nutrition and fitness and takes

tennis classes at Mission College. He is busy with five grandkids, taking the time to enjoy the next generation of Ibarra's.

"Michael, at 97 is a member of three bowling leagues His philosophy for a long life is to live cleanly, watch what you eat ... lots of veggies and fruit, take time to relax and laugh, don't sweat the small stuff, make friends with everybody and get some exercise. Age is mind over matter. If you don't mind it doesn't matter. He also says, as long as I have my health, age is irrelevant."



Editor's note: Michael's story is an example of how an immigrant with nothing more than his determination and hard work was able to create a successful life for himself, his family and the generations that followed. The young city of Sunnyvale benefitted from the affordable homes he helped build to transform it from orchard farms to a high technology center. The local community benefitted from the money he spent and the custom products he sold. His faith and dedication to his church contributed to strengthening the social fabric of his city and its citizens. His children, the next generation of US citizens are all productive and compassionate contributors to their local communities. Their children will probably do the same. Michael's story is not a glamorized story of a billionaire's ascent from rags to riches, but more so a mainstream, local and personal story of what hard work and determination can achieve in America. His is the real American story.