

A DAY WITHOUT IMMIGRANTS

Businesses close in show of solidarity

Owners, most of them Latino, demonstrate impact on community

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Protests and boycotts swept across the country on Thursday for the Day Without Immigrants movement. Immigrants closed their businesses, boycotted attending classes and didn't go to work to demonstrate the impact immigrant communities have on the economy and protest Trump administration immigration policies and rhetoric.

In Greater Lafayette, dozens of immigrant-owned businesses quietly closed their doors to join the national movement.

Some of the businesses posted signs on the door, expressing solidarity and explaining the decision to close. Others posted no notice, letting the dark storefronts and empty parking lots speak volumes.

Nearly all of the participating businesses are owned by Latin-American immigrants or their children.

Automotive Solutions owner Jose Gaeta said he's proud to stand in solidarity with the nation's immigrant community. Although he will lose thousands of dollars by shutting his doors, he said sending a message is more important.

"I don't play politics, but I believe in equal rights for everybody. And I don't think that is the direction the leaders in the White House are taking us. This has always been the greatest country in the world," Gaeta said.

Gaeta hopes to send a signal to local and national leaders that aggressive and nonrestrictive immigration policy and rhetoric won't be tolerated.



Mama Ines Mexican Bakery owner Rosa Gaeta Cornejo closed all four of her Indiana locations Thursday to support A Day Without Immigrants, a nationwide protest against President Donald Trump's immigration policy and rhetoric.

PHOTOS BY JOHN TERHUNE/JOURNAL & COURIER



The parking lot was empty Thursday at Jose Gaeta's business, Automotive Solutions.

For others, like Eddy Del Real, manager of Del Real Auto Sales in Lafayette, shutting down also was about sending an economic signal.

"We pay thousands of dollars in taxes, as one family we employ close to 30 people," he said. Imagine the ripple effect, he suggested, if that all goes away.

Rose Gaeta Cornejo, owner of Mama Ines Mexican Bakery, closed all four of her bakery locations. She said she closed first and foremost to support all of her customers — of all origins and races.

"There is only one race. ... People see what Trump is doing and they see hate. All this day is doing is asking, begging people to treat us the right way, not to give us what we don't deserve," Gaeta Cornejo said.

She does, however, have some concerns about people's reaction. It's a small community, she said. Other business owners had similar concerns.

Gaeta said he knows a lot of Trump supporters might not take kindly to the protest.

"I know it's a risk for business owners because we depend on the community for our business. ... This isn't the smartest economic move we can make as business owners, but not everything is about the economy," Gaeta said.

It wasn't just business owners participating in Thursday's protests.

All of Maria Alvarez's daughters, for example, did not attend school in solidarity with other immigrants and immigrant children around the nation.

"Today, we're here having breakfast and talking about the immigration situation and how important this is for everyone," Alvarez said. "My daughters want to be part of it and they're happy we're doing something about it."

And Alvarez wasn't the only one allowing her children to remain home.

Lafayette School Corporation Superintendent Les Huddle said absentee rates throughout the school system saw a significant spike on Thursday, especially among Latino students.

“As a person in my position I would prefer they be in school but I certainly understand their position,” Huddle said. “It’s hard to disagree.”

Business owners said there was no single leader to organize the protest locally. A lot of the conversations happened privately over Facebook and text messages until most local Latino business owners felt they could not, in good faith, remain open.

Jose Munoz, owner of La Tapatia restaurant said when he first heard about the protests he was skeptical about the impact it could have locally. With so many businesses participating, however, he said he is rethinking this and feels proud to be part of the movement.

“I was concerned because it’s a small town and might not have a big impact,” Munoz said. “It’s not like we’re a huge city where whole streets will be closed. But we have to support the cause.”

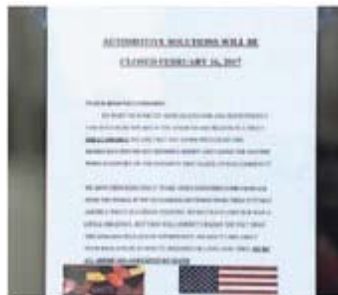
Call J&C reporter Emma Ea Ambrose at 765-431-1192. Follow her on Twitter: @emma_ea_ambrose.



Notes explain why Mama Ines Mexican Bakery, at 518 Sagamore Parkway North in Lafayette, was closed Thursday.



Taco Rico, at 1325 Sagamore Parkway in Lafayette, also was closed.



Automotive Solutions owner Jose Gaeta acknowledged that his stand would be costly.

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