

Latino Economics in the United States: Job Diversity
By Eric Schwartz, 2006

“Looking for Opportunities”

Deborah Wainstein was planning on a career in fashion design, a subject that had interested her from childhood. After graduating from college, she thought her career was set.

“But I worked in that field for two years, and decided I didn’t like it,” Wainstein remembers. Living at home, supported by her parents, however, was not an option. “My father made that pretty clear to me,” she remembers.

As it turned out, a friend owned a temporary staffing agency in New York City, and Wainstein decided to try her hand at the business, selling the services to prospective clients. She liked it, and ended up working in the industry for about ten years.

During those years, however, Wainstein saw a growing need that wasn’t being addressed. A lot of the applicants were bilingual, principally Latino. Wainstein says she saw the opportunity to “build an alliance with the applicants, and at the same time add something of value to the market.

Wainstein lined up the backing of some venture capitalists, and in 1999, she started her own company to address the need for bilingual temporary help. Her hunch turned out to be on the money, and the company has grown steadily ever since. Wainstein started her business literally on top of a folding table, but by 2001, gross revenues were \$2.3 million, and they reached \$3.8 million in 2003.

The company has a corporate contract in Indiana,, and it is forming a strategic business alliance in Chicago. As many as seven hundred people are employed through the agency every day. Many of these employees are Latinos, employed either in light industrial or office work. For example, Wainstein says, many translators are employed through the agency. “Most of the growth has been in the bilingual area,” she says.

Wainstein, a native of the United States but the child of two Colombian Jewish immigrants, says she has changed her view of her Hispanic heritage over the years. As a child growing up first in Brooklyn and then in Long Island, Wainstein says she encountered prejudice. “I would get called ‘spic,’ and I’d ask my mom to stop speaking to me in Spanish,” Wainstein recalls.

But when Wainstein started her company, she found that her Latino heritage could actually be an asset. For one thing, she qualified for certain “set aside” contracts as a Latina. But her heritage helped in other, more important ways as well. “It’s because of my parents that I am where I am today,” she says. “They were very firm, teaching me about the importance of hard work. I think it’s very important to remember your roots. I don’t believe in compromising who you are, personally or professionally. My attitude is: ‘This is me. How can I make this work for me?’”

