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LIVING

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Family from Mexico hopes to achieve the American dream

By CHRISTINA MITCHELL
Courier-Post Staff

Alejandro Cordova has never forgotten the day he arrived in Brooklyn, New York, from his hometown of Peubla, Mexico.

Aug. 18, 1989.

A teenager whose only exposure to America was at the movies, Cordova was going to live with his parents. His father, Saul (sa-OOL), had already spent 20 years working in one New York restaurant after another to support his children back home.

"I thought, 'What am I doing here?'" recalls Alejandro, 28, of his arrival in Brooklyn. "I had a vision of my parents with a garage and a yard."

In Mexico, Saul and Susana Cordova had a house and even a cook. But while Saul Cordova came to work in the land of economic dreams so he could put his six children through college in Mexico, his living arrangements were spare.

"It was a big disappointment. They were living in Sunset Park in Brooklyn in a duplex...They're like boxes. It was a big change for me," says Alejandro.

Alejandro calls his family's new Mexican restaurant in Lindenwold La Esperanza, which means hope.

The hope that drives him is that the six-month-old restaurant will eventually make him and his father financially independent.

Saul Cordova now lives with Alejandro in a two-story

house in Stratford, where he putters in the garden each day. Alejandro works days at Cigna Corp. in Voorhees and spends evenings overseeing the restaurant with his brother, Saul, and sisters Claudia and Marisela.

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that my parents are living differently now," says Alejandro, an abundantly friendly man who gets to know customers by occasionally waiting tables.

La Esperanza is getting good word-of-mouth with homemade delicacies such as mole Poblano and guacamole mixed table-side. Fajitas are big. And bottles of soda and Sangria are imported from Mexico.

So is the Cordova family's penchant for hard work.

Alejandro and four siblings were raised by their oldest sister while his parents were in America. But the teenage Alejandro was deemed too hard to handle and sent packing. He spent two years in an American high school while learning to speak English at night, and waited on the likes of the late John Gotti while working at a Brooklyn diner.

After college, Alejandro landed at Cigna and convinced his parents to join him in Stratford.

He tried his hand at selling Mexican groceries on the Web, but his business was a victim of the dot-com bust.

The idea of opening a Mexican grocery in Lindwenswold fizzled; there were already three in the town, which has a growing Hispanic population.

"(Having a restaurant) is something my parents always wanted to do, since that's what they know how to do best," says Alejandro.

The Cordovas bought a former hair salon at 40 Clementon-Gibbsboro Road for \$129,000 and opened for business in January.

"Overall, it has lived up to expectations, and probably more," says Alejandro.

"I joke that this place is the retirement plan for my mother and father. But I think three or four years down the road, they can finally do it."

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Ties That Bind is a weekly column about families. If you have a story to tell, contact Christina Mitchell at (856) 317-7905 or cmitchell@courierpostonline.com.

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