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In Ind., staying among their own

By Haya El Nasser, USA TODAY

During the day, residents of Goshen, Ind., are steeped in diversity. Anglos and Hispanics mill about Main Street. They eat side by side at the El Camino Real restaurant. They shop at the San Marcos convenience store and the many Hispanic-owned businesses that have moved in during the past five years. In the RV-assembly and manufacturing plants, the backbone of the regional economy, Hispanics work alongside non-Hispanics. But when the stores and restaurants close and the work shifts are over, Hispanics retreat to the north side of town. The mostly non-Hispanic white residents go the other way.

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The segregation of neighborhoods is deepening in places such as Goshen, in northern Indiana, where Hispanics now are the largest minority. The number of Hispanics in the Elkhart-Goshen metro area increased 468% to 16,300 during the last decade. They now make up 9% of the population (182,791). Blacks, the largest minority in 1990, account for 6%.

As more Hispanic immigrants settle around the country, they tend to stick together. An analysis of Census 2000 population numbers shows that Hispanics and non-Hispanic whites are increasingly becoming segregated in those metro areas where Hispanics became the largest minority group in the 1990s.

Census data are available for 41 states so far. John Logan, a University at Albany sociologist who analyzed the data, found 16 metros in those states where, since 1990, Hispanics grew into the largest minority group.

In 11 of these metros, he found that Hispanics are becoming increasingly segregated. It's happening in large, diverse metros such as New York and Dallas. It's also happening in smaller areas: Enid, Okla., and Sherman-Denison, Texas, north of Dallas.

Logan says it's even happening in metro areas where Hispanics now outnumber non-Hispanic whites. In the Jersey City, N.J., metro, Hispanics became the majority in the '90s but are becoming more segregated now.

In places such as Goshen that had few minorities to begin with, Hispanics are clustering in a few neighborhoods, creating a distinct line between minority and majority populations.

They're people such as the Brisenos. The family of six came straight to Goshen from Hidalgo, Mexico, in 1995. Friends who settled there in the 1980s told them about the need for workers in local factories.

Like most Hispanic immigrants, they rented a house on the north side, once a working-class, white neighborhood. Roberto Briseno, 53, found a job at HomeCrest, a cabinetry manufacturer based in Goshen. It wasn't long before he was able to buy a house - on the north side.

"It was just that we passed by and we liked it," says Jenny Briseno, 18, Roberto's youngest daughter and the family interpreter. "It wasn't because there are a lot of Hispanics living in that neighborhood."

Many Hispanics wind up in predominately Hispanic neighborhoods, however, because that is the only part of town where they can live.

Becky Gascho, director of community services for LaCasa of Goshen Inc., a non-profit group that offers bilingual services for low-income residents, says housing discrimination is a growing problem.

"It's been difficult for the town," Gascho says. "We have landlords who are discriminating. We have businesses that are not set up to deal with them. We have hospitals and doctors who can't speak the language."

New immigrants tend to segregate themselves at first because they want to be around people who speak the same language and share their culture. "They want to live near friends and relatives. They don't say 'I want to live in a segregated area,' " says Douglas Massey, a sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania.

Because many are poor when they arrive, the concentration of immigrants in one area can create problems.

A lack of integration often creates pockets of poverty. Poor immigrants need more social services such as medical care and bilingual education. And often the community doesn't have the tax base to support the services. "A more segregated population, especially if minorities are becoming larger, creates questions about how to provide public service," Logan says.

On the other hand, Hispanic immigrants have been credited with revitalizing neighborhoods that were neglected for decades and have helped the economy by filling service and manufacturing jobs that went begging in times of high employment.

The growth in the number of Hispanics in areas that had few before is a concern to civil rights groups. Marisa Demeo, regional counsel for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, says some communities in the South have tried to pass ordinances that would effectively stop immigrants from coming in. The organization received so many complaints that it opened an office in Atlanta. Some cities have tried to use zoning laws to restrict the number of people who can live in one house.

Hispanics are not as segregated from whites as blacks have been since such population measures were first looked at by the "segregation index" in the early 20th century. The index shows the percentage of a minority group that would have to move to neighborhoods with fewer minorities in order to be fully integrated with whites. For blacks, it's 68% nationally. For Hispanics, it's 54.4%.

"Over time, Hispanic segregation will wind down," says William Frey, demographer with the non-profit Milken Institute in Santa Monica, Calif.



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