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One Mexican Province, Bulloch County and Us

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What does a southern Mexican province have to do with southeast Georgia? On a recent monthlong working visit to Vera-
cruz province in southern Mexico, I was
struck by the similarities and amazed at all the people who had spent
time in Georgia — often southeast
Georgia in particular.

With 7 million people
and 212 counties, Veracruz's
geography is stunning and
competes with the province's
amazing history going back
thousands of years to the
Olmec culture and beyond.
However, it also has a great
port city of Veracruz City
with an academic city,
Xalapa, about one hour
inland.

Xalapa is much bigger
than Statesboro and is also
the province's capital, but
the port/inland city rela-
tionships are similar. Even
the history of the two states,
Georgia and Veracruz, are
similar, with many of the
Civil War generals who
passed through Georgia
first passing through Vera-
cruz in the 1840s Mexican-
American War.

While living there, I
shopped at Walmart, Sam's
Club and Costco, which had
not put the mom and pop
businesses that surrounded
them out of business. On
the contrary, everywhere
one turns in Xalapa, mom
and pop small businesses
are selling an amazing array
of goods, many of which
directly compete with big
discounters.

Mexico is also a country of
murals — including a mural
of the 1914 U.S. invasion of
Veracruz City on the wall
at the economics depart-
ment at the University of
Veracruz-Xalapa (uv.mx/
fac.economia).

SCAD students would love
the economics department
— mural after mural show-
ing history and personages.
But the economy of
Veracruz cannot support
the jobs that are needed, so
many Veracruzanos come
to southeast Georgia. Here,
the two states touch again
as the remittances sent back
from states such as Georgia
are the second largest source
of Veracruz province's gross
domestic product.

Only the oil lying off the
cost and controlled by the
federal government has a
higher share in the prov-
ce's GDP. So the tiendas
and Western Union offices
I see in Bulloch County are
directly linked to Veracruz.

Many in the province
would prefer to stay and
work near home, but the
jobs are not there, so they
come north. As this is the
era of "stimulus" packages,
one has to wonder if instead
of building a wall on the
U.S. southern border, what
would happen if we gave the
money to Veracruz province
as a stimulus package?

Many Mexican families
would be reunited and
immigration would be much
less.

Thanks to recent research
(see references with this
column), I learned more
about these hardy Veracru-
zanos who complete amaz-
jing journeys to the U.S. in
search of higher wages. Just
crossing the border costs
$4,000 or more. Once in
the U.S., they often pay in to
Social Security while having
no intention of ever taking
money out of the system.
Undocumented workers
contribute some $7 billion
and even $1.5 billion to
Medicare as well.

They will often avoid
using doctors and hospitals
out of fear of being discov-
ered. With 20 percent of the
population of Mexico living
on $1,000 a year or less, a
job in the U.S. below our
poverty line paying $10,000
is quite attractive.

Many items such as
durables and cars are
surprisingly cheaper in the
U.S., leading to shopping
expeditions to places such as
south Texas. Language has
adapted to the point there is
a Spanish verb meaning "to
go shopping in south Texas."

I wish these facts and
the money they reveal were
included in the discussion
of immigration in the U.S.
Many of my Mexican friends
wonder about that, too.

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