

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Leaders from Salisbury Rowan Meet and Share Hopes to Promote Cultural Understanding through Trip to Mexico

Food Lion Vice President Shares Information and Enlightens Team to Opportunity to Become Catalysts for Better Communications

Salisbury, NC –September 15, 2006 – Eric Watson, Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion for Food Lion, LLC, spoke this past week to a team of Salisbury Rowan delegates, as they finalized preparations for departure to Mexico on September 18th. The nine-member contingent is part of a three-county task force, including Union and Cabarrus, which will travel south of the border in hopes of gaining a deeper understanding of the cultural, political, social and economic issues impacting the Hispanic community. The seven-day program, entitled “Latino Initiative”, was established through The Center for International Understanding at the University of North Carolina. The initiative strives to provide NC leaders with resources and information to create practical solutions for successfully incorporating immigrants into their communities.

Watson, a Mecklenburg county resident and previous year participant of “The Latino Initiative”, shared, “The trip to Mexico with the Mecklenburg County Group was life changing for me. As part of the group of Corporate representatives, Educators, Civic Leaders and Non-profit Leaders, we were exposed to the reality for those who come to the U.S.” Watson further enlightened the team to the value of his participation in regards to his position at Food Lion. “I am able to better manage our Hispanic Strategies and gained insight that confirmed the need for a Hispanic Specialist on my Team”. Other topics Watson discussed, included valuable information on trip expectations, communications and gaining cultural understanding. Furthermore, he encouraged each individual present, to look at the trip as an opportunity to bring back something positive to Salisbury Rowan, which would help to impact their particular work within the community. In closing, Watson noted, “The personal and professional learnings will serve me extensively in my day to day job.”

Among those representing Salisbury Rowan in the 2006 Latino Initiative are: Yvonne Dixon, Diversity Coordinator for Rowan Regional Medical Center; Kyna Foster, Manager of Community Affairs for Food Lion; Cheryl Marsh, Dean of Pre-college Studies at Rowan Cabarrus Community College, Lillian Morgan, Director of Migrant Education/Title 1/ESOL for the Rowan-Salisbury Schools; and Nancy Wyrick, Vice-President of F&M Bank. In addition, local County and City government representatives include: Jim Sides, Vice chairman of the Rowan County Board of Commissioners; Scott Flowers, Master Deputy for the Rowan County Sheriff's Department and School Resource Officer; Susan Kluttz, Mayor of the City of Salisbury; and Ruth Chaparro, Director of the City's Multicultural Division and liaison to the Salisbury-Rowan Hispanic Coalition.

While in Mexico, team members will have the opportunity to spend time with host families and to experience the Latino culture. The group will meet and interact with political and civic leaders and numerous service agency representatives. After meeting the governor of Guanajuato, members will visit urban and rural areas throughout the state. Guanajuato is the homeplace for many Latino immigrants currently living in Salisbury Rowan. Studies conducted at The Center for International Understanding show that North Carolina currently has the fastest growing Latino population of any state, and that most of the state's newest residents are from Mexico. Among the many goals of the Latino Initiative, is the opportunity to develop a multi-disciplinary network of leaders interested in investigating the challenges of incorporating immigrants into strong North Carolina communities.

Mayor Susan Kluttz of Salisbury shares her thoughts regarding her role as a team member in the Latino Initiative, "To understand a culture, which is relatively new here, helps us better serve our community in areas such as local government, health care, education, law enforcement and business, which continue to be impacted. We are most fortunate in North Carolina to have the UNC Center for International Understanding, a program unique in the United States, which identifies the counties with the fastest-growing Hispanic populations in the state and secures grant funding to send local delegations to areas in Mexico from which many of the Hispanics in North Carolina have lived. The delegation representing Rowan County represents a diverse group of people who will return better equipped to advise, not only their particular professions, but the entire county in its search to continue to work to improve the lives of all people in Salisbury and Rowan County. Although the question of immigration is a controversial issue in our nation today, those of us involved on the local level, do not make those decisions and understand that we must look beyond the controversy to the reality that the influx of Hispanics has changed our communities and created new challenges and opportunities."

Following their return on September 24th, the team will begin to create an action plan for developing lessons learned, presenting them to a wide circle of colleagues, and applying them to effect appropriate change within the participants' organizations. Members have agreed to serve the community as a resource regarding integrating immigrants by identifying the city and county issues that need attention.

Ruth Chaparro, City of Salisbury Multiculturalism Director adds, "My vision is to see the community embrace the cultures that are present and those to come. My hope is to share the experience of the trip with as many people as we can. After this message is shared I hope to team up with people, organizations, and clubs to combine forces in a positive way." Chaparro, the only Hispanic which will be taking the trip from Salisbury Rowan adds that the mission of the trip is the all encompassing purpose, "We are going to learn and network with other leaders in nearby cities and bring back information so that our County can create a plan and work together on the issues that we are confronting. We need to remain focused on the mission, which is to observe, learn and bring back to our community".

Lillian Morgan, Director of Migrant Education/Title 1/ESOL for the Rowan-Salisbury Schools and a member of the delegation to Mexico, shares her thoughts on the upcoming trip. "I am pleased to be a member of the group that is going to Mexico for several reasons. One, which I'll share is as my title notes, I am involved with all students who come to the school system with English as a Second Language. It is so important to know the needs of these students to make sure they receive the help needed to become successful students in our schools. We can not turn any student away (public schools) and our teachers need help in knowing how to teach students who come from other countries. I want to learn more about the educational system to better fill the gaps we are experiencing when Latino children enter our schools. The mission of the trip is just that...to acquire a better understanding of the cultural, political, social and economic systems of Mexico that will help us (as a community) better deal with the needs/challenges of the growing Mexican population to our county. We must assess how and what we think, and try to come up with solutions to address problems that may hinder building a strong inclusive community."

As their schedule allows while in Mexico, team members will communicate their experiences to the Salisbury Rowan community, via fax. The City of Salisbury's Public Information and Communications Department will receive, compile and distribute this information upon receipt. Media interested in receiving these updates from Mexico in the form of a release, should email Karen Wilkinson at kwilk@salisburync.gov. The Latino Initiative has received grant funding from the Robertson Foundation and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation. For more information regarding the City of Salisbury and its services and departments, please visit us on the World Wide Web at www.salisburync.gov.

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