

HELP TO SMALL BUSINESSES IN PROVO

By CHRIS SEIFERT
SALT LAKE

Five would-be Hispanic entrepreneurs got a jumpstart on a new life Friday, Aug. 15, as they took part in graduation ceremonies for a three-month program called "Mentores para los Micro-prestamos."

The Provo-based program is designed to help local Hispanics acquire loans to start their own businesses, said Roberto Castro, a sociology student at BYU and one of four teachers for the program.

"I'm very excited about this program. The reason I'm doing it is because I'm an immigrant myself, and I know how hard it is," said Castro, who is a native of El Salvador and gained interest in business while working for his father's clothing factory. "I see Hispanic people as being very industrious, but they don't have the resources sometimes. I want Hispanics here in Utah to have those resources."

Before the potential entrepreneurs in the program may receive

loans to start their own businesses, they must complete a nine-week course and make an official proposal for a business. Friday's graduates were the first to complete the necessary training, and classes will resume for anyone interested on Sept. 12 at Centro Hispano at the St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church located at 500 W. 172 North in Provo.

Castro said the loan amounts range from \$500 to \$1,000 and are donated by banks and businesses in the Provo area. Once an individual has paid back a loan, he or she can petition for another loan to continue to expand the business. The classes, which are taught in Spanish, teach individuals about business marketing, planning, accounting and licensing, Castro said.

Teachers sometimes make calls to government agencies to help individuals who don't speak English apply for the licenses, he said, and the organization does not inquire about a person's legal status in the United States before offering a loan.

Castro's wife, Lauren Castro, said the program gives immigrants a boost toward success.

"It's for people who — a lot of them don't know English — and they just have a lot of disadvantages here to get ahead," she said. "Financially, they're not well off, so this gives them a little hope."

Roberto Castro pointed to a few of the success stories among the first batch of graduates.

One graduate, Mateo Gonzales, is a carpenter who took the classes with the hopes of gaining licenses and additional equipment to allow him to acquire contracts to build walls, doors, furniture and counters.

Another graduate, Maria Rey, plans to buy a \$5,000 machine that will allow her to make Spanish pastries called rozcocs, which she can sell in local grocery stores.

"We're helping her get started with it," Roberto Castro said. "So, it's very, very exciting."

For information about the program, call Roberto Castro at (801) 371-2744.

The Centro Hispano and Provo City will help sponsor a celebration of Hispanic culture Saturday, Sept. 13, from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Festivities will take place at Provo's Pioneer Park, Centro Hispano, Dixon Middle School and the Provo Teen Center, and will include musical performances, a children's parade, a youth soccer tournament, a carnival, food and games.

Leo Espinosa, an employee of Utah Valley State College's Centro Hispano, said the celebration will coincide with Hispanic Heritage Month and organizers hope the event will build understanding between Hispanic and non-Hispanic residents of Utah

County.

"It's a big fiesta," Espinosa said. Espinosa also said Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, will likely attend the event along with other government leaders.

Many local service organizations — including the fire department, police department, Red Cross, housing services, banks, etc. — will present booths at the celebration to help foster community understanding.

Musical performers will include Tradiciones de los Alma and los Hermanos de los Andes.

A raffle will be conducted for free classes, T-shirts, books and other prizes.