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New Americans *building business*

Many new immigrants come to this country to find opportunity and never find it. Immigrants Bernie Antoloin from the Philippines and Ivy Nascimento from Brazil found plenty of it and are still enjoying the fruits of their labors at the flower and gift shop they co-own in Kew Gardens.

By Christa Weber

Lefferts Florists and Gifts in Kew Gardens is unusual in that it's owned by not one, but two new Americans. Eleven years ago, Bernie Antoloin from the Philippines and Ivy Nascimento from Brazil teamed up to open the shop and now business is booming.

In 1965, Antoloin came to the United States as a Filipino representative with the World's Fair. He was representing his country's government as a guide, a position he had earned after a vigorous screening process that he underwent with a large group of young people.

"Basically, the knowledge of the history of the country was important so we could tell the American people about our culture," he said.

After the fair, he went back to the Philippines, but had liked the United States so much that he only stayed there for a year before coming back permanently. According to Antoloin, the draw was not only the opportunities the United States presented, but that it seemed like an interesting and exciting place to live. He worked for the United Nations for a few years before taking a job as a computer programmer with ITT and then finally entering the business world.

He started as an employee at a wholesale lighting company but was soon running the show. Eight years later, he made a brief foray into the fitness industry working at a health club before settling comfortably into the world of flowers.

"It's a nice clean business," he said. "There are both joys and sorrows to selling flowers because you do both weddings and funerals. You make things happier for people and flowers can solve different kinds of problems. And it's relaxing."

According to Antoloin, he never



Ivy Nascimento (left) and Bernie Antoloin

dreamed that he would be in the flower business, or even any business at all, but considers himself lucky. Though he has been through many ups and downs, he likes the way his life has unfolded so far and considers enjoying what he does for

a living very important.

The circumstances behind Nascimento's immigration were not as happy as his associate's. He came to the United States 18 years ago when the economy of Brazil was doing badly. The business he owned went under

and, after some soul searching, he decided that it was time for a change of location.

"Brazil wasn't working for me," he said. "I came here because I really felt I needed to come here. I knew I could make it here."

As Antoloin said, if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere.

Though Nascimento didn't know much about the United States, he had heard good things about the opportunities available. He worked, saving his money, and though he hadn't planned on necessarily remaining in the United States permanently, he loved it so much that he stayed.

He worked at all kinds of jobs, and at one point, was holding down three simultaneously. It was only a few years later that Antoloin started looking for a business to buy. He and Nascimento saw an ad for a flower shop in a newspaper.

"Bernie wanted to check it out," said Nascimento. "When we looked at it for the first time, he said that he knew nothing about flowers. I'd had prior experience selling flowers in Brazil and I knew how to do arrangements."

Today, the two men run a successful business with an established clientele. According to Antoloin, florists pay more rent and overhead than other business-owners, but they do a lot of business to offset that. They work with both local customers and celebrities seeking flowers for a special event, as well as Jewish customers who want weekly deliveries on Friday for Shabbat. They also work with local cemeteries to set up holiday arrangements, of which Nascimento e-mails far-away family members pictures.

"The shop wasn't doing so well when we got here, which is why he was selling it," he said. "But when we got here, we turned it around. People like us here."

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