

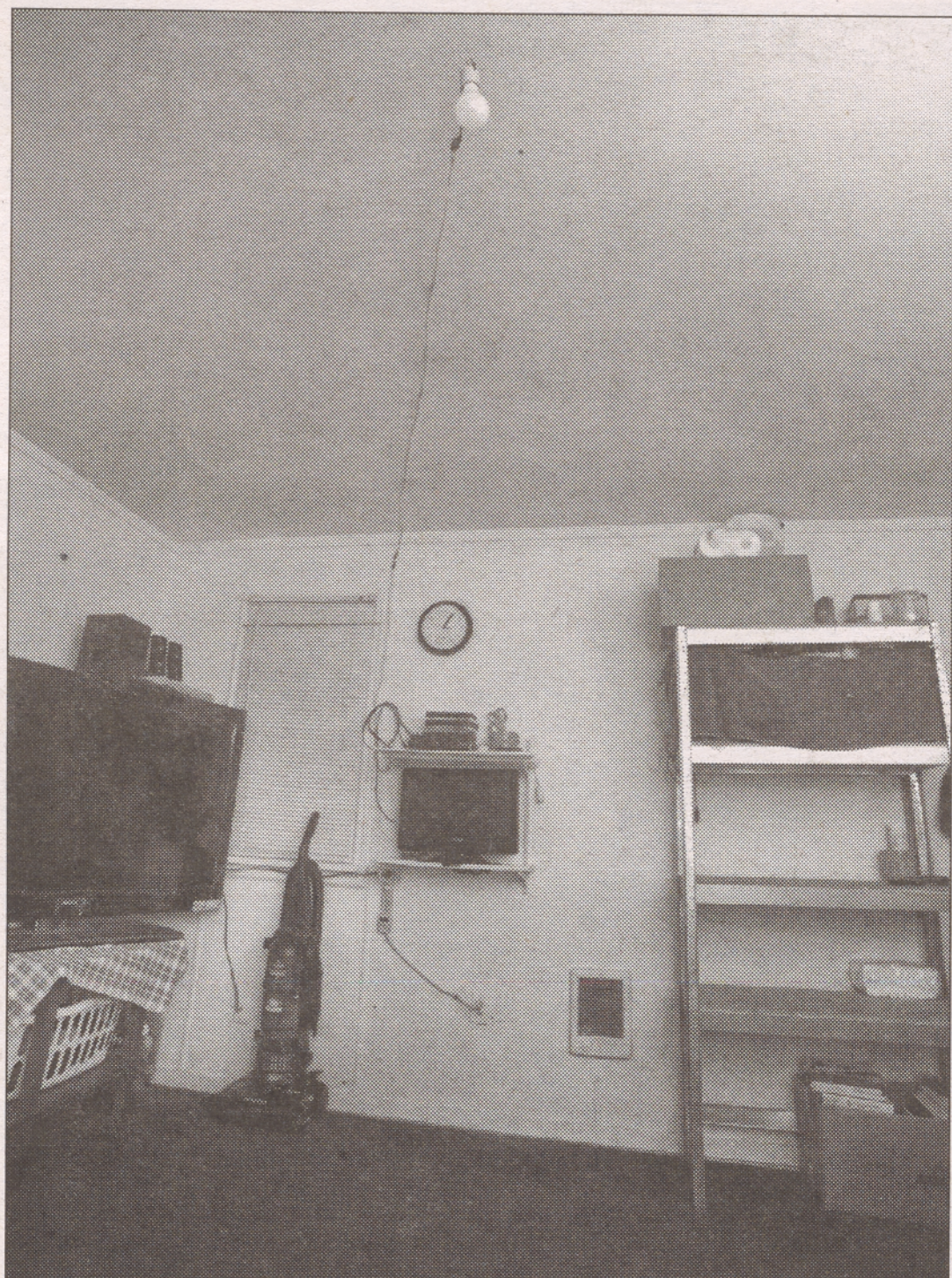


PHOTO BY ALAN BORRUD

Above, the Cervantes living room also serves as the main storage area. The only other rooms in the apartment are the kitchen and a bathroom.



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Diversity in the field: Santiago Ibarra Lopez works a nursery product production line at Smith Gardens nursery in Aurora.



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Above, Angelica Perez and her baby, the youngest of four children, stands near the sink in one of two large rooms and a small bathroom that function as living quarters for the six-person family.

Left, Portrait of a farmworker: Israel Perez sits for a portrait at the Canby area agricultural food products company where he works.

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J.Z.: Woodburn's population is majority Latino — an uncommon statistic for Oregon. It's a destination for farm working families. How does this multicultural environment benefit the families there?

R.J.: This is all about opportunity, right? If a head of a household who is currently a farmworker has the opportunity to change career paths by age 30 or shortly thereafter, they'll seize it. If they don't change career paths before the age of 40, they will not change career paths. So their focus is on their children and their education opportunities. And their children are highly aware of that. These children grow up fast. It's not lost on them.

J.Z.: They're looking to the next generation

R.J.: Very much to the next generation. The children are keenly aware that they are, very often, their parents' retirement plan. The graduation rate among high-school-aged youth among our properties last year was 100 percent. It's not that we're actually providing a high level of support services. It actually doesn't take that much. Nationally, they're somewhere between 40 and 60 percent. But they are increasing rapidly, so

there's a real desire for education and an understanding that that's where opportunities lie.

J.Z.: How do you think their children's lives are going to be different from their parents? I presume it's safe to say this is not a generation that's going to be doing what they're parents are doing.

R.J.: It's not. That's pretty much true across the board. The children of farmworkers won't be farmworkers. And historically they haven't been.

J.Z.: What makes the need for affordable housing for farmworkers, a need unto itself?

R.J.: There are various subsets in affordable housing. The origins of farmworker housing are different. Other subsets — developmentally disabled, senior, drug and alcohol — are often classified federally, so the funds came in that way. This is a case where on-farm housing was not sufficient for various reasons, and part of that was just changes in the economy, in the workforce. Fifty, even 25 years ago, kids were working summer jobs in the fields. Changes in labor law made that impossible. So growers went looking for a new labor force, an immigrant population that already had connections in agriculture. Economies

in California and Texas realized we could fill this demand; call people back home and more people come. And yet growers didn't have the housing for those people year-round.

And so in Oregon, FHDC stepped in — forming in the late 1980s, and started developing community-based housing, because we were seeing a lot of homelessness and a lot of really, really substandard housing conditions on farms. It was housing that was not intended to be year-round housing. It was supposed to be seasonal.

J.Z.: Describe some of those conditions that made them substandard.

R.J.: There may or may not be plumbing. There may or may not be electricity. Imagine trying to keep groceries? Where do you put that food?

We've done interventions at times. We rescued a family that was living in a trailer. We got a call from a local health clinic that the woman was pregnant, that she had to get inside that weekend, the weather will be freezing. She had two young kids already, there was a crack in the ceiling. When we got there it was raining inside. They said she was going to lose her child. Not all conditions are like that, but those kinds of

"Ninety percent of the families who came to live in our housing were technically homeless before they came to live there. So we're stabilizing families, and it's all graduated from there on up."

conditions still exist.

When we picked her up, she was walking along the side of the road with her 5-year-old son. And she was walking in flip-flops. She said she had walked five miles into town. And when we got back to her house she lit a fire with trash. She boiled beans, just beans and water, over a trash barrel.

J.Z.: How do conditions get to that point? What are the obstacles to better housing conditions?

R.J.: Indigenous people in Mexico have been severely oppressed for centuries now. They have lived, in many cases, in isolated conditions there. That's a matter of both history and survival, and so they come here and in many cases the conditions just don't

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