



Office of
International and
Immigrant Affairs



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: July 5, 2017

Media Contact: Michael Bryant
Senior Public Information Officer
303.739.7181
mbryant@auroragov.org

Aurora Welcome Center and Village Exchange Center to merge, expanding services to immigrants and refugees

AURORA, Colo. – The Aurora Welcome Center is merging with the recently formed nonprofit Village Exchange Center, resulting in expanded services available to the immigrant and refugee communities of Aurora and the metro area.

Many of the Aurora Welcome Center's programs and services will continue to be available through the Village Exchange Center, which recently opened at the former St. Matthew Lutheran Church building at 1609 Havana St. The building has 15,000 square feet of space available for faith groups, community gatherings and office space.

“We are excited to see a future that not only preserves the important services that the Aurora Welcome Center has created for our local immigrants and refugees, but also promises a way to improve and expand upon those services,” said Ricardo Gambetta, head of Aurora's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs. “The Village Exchange Center offers so much space and so much expertise in dealing with the international community, and we believe this merger will do much to benefit the 20 percent of Aurora residents who were born outside the United States.”

One of the most popular programs of the Aurora Welcome Center is the Natural Helpers Program, which is sponsored by the city of Aurora's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs. The program recently was honored with the Denver Regional Council of Governments' Metro Vision Award. It involves volunteers from the local community who help fellow immigrants and refugees in the process of integration into receiving communities. Natural Helpers Program Manager Lara Frey will transfer to the Village Exchange Center.

Financial backers of the Aurora Welcome Center have expressed support for the merger. “The Buck Foundation is proud to support a city that cares and supports all of its residents, immigrants and refugees together, and we look forward to continuing to support this legacy through the Village Exchange Center,” said PJ D’Amico, executive director of The Buck Foundation, which has provided grants for the Aurora Welcome Center.

The Aurora Welcome Center was formed in 2008 as a multi-tenant facility focused on providing services to the immigrant and refugee community, including English instruction, civics and citizenship classes, childbirth and fatherhood support, and more.

The majority of the Aurora Welcome Center tenants will relocate to the Village Exchange Center location at 1609 Havana St., and the tenants with a strong focus on the children of Aurora Public Schools will continue occupancy at the 1085 Peoria St. location.

“We are very excited about the merger with the Village Exchange Center and the possibility of expanding our services with a bigger location,” said Diana Higuera, executive director of the Aurora Welcome Center. “The combination of both of our teams will make an even stronger organization with the right expertise to keep serving immigrants and refugees. Our visions for the future are very much aligned, and this is a natural fit for both.”

As part of the merger, all corporate assets of the Aurora Welcome Center will transfer to the Village Exchange Center, and up to two board members of the Aurora Welcome Center will join the board of the Village Exchange Center.

“We are proud and honored to inherit the hard work and perseverance that the city of Aurora and Diana Higuera and her team have put in over the years on behalf of the refugees and immigrants of Aurora,” said Amanda Blaurock, executive director of Village Exchange Center. “We plan to honor the legacy of the Aurora Welcome Center and the Natural Helpers Program by expanding the current offerings and furthering their vision of creating a ‘one-stop shop’ service and community center celebrating cultural diversity.”

###