

‘Nosotros’ to stage stories of Latino lives, journeys

By JEREMY GROSSMAN

RED BANK — If there’s anything that Jerry Ruiz took away from the first phase of the Two River Theater’s unique “Nosotros” program, it’s that the Latino community in Monmouth County has a very strong unity.

The “Nosotros” program, which kicked off late last year, is one of the initiatives the Two River Theater is creating to welcome the surrounding Latino community to the theater.

Throughout December, Ruiz and playwright Tanya Saracho invited approximately 30 residents to share their stories of being Latino in Monmouth County. Ruiz and Saracho will create a play inspired by their interviews, which the Two River Theater will then develop.

One experience that stood out for Ruiz was the difficulty many residents had in crossing the border into the United States.

“It’s especially dangerous for women to make that journey,” Ruiz said. “They’re vulnerable to all kinds of tough situations, so I think that’s something that we’re interested in, and that Tanya is really interested in exploring as we move forward.”

Another aspect that Ruiz finds interesting is the “next generation” Latinos, who came to the United States at a very young age or who were born within U.S. borders.

“It’s interesting how they really sort of straddle the two worlds, the two cultures,” Ruiz said. “I think a lot of responsibility is placed on them sometimes if their parents don’t speak [English] or have a harder time navigating life in the United States.

“It’s the next generation that’s taking up that torch. Sometimes they’ll have to go to the doctor and translate for their parent if the doctor doesn’t speak Spanish.”

He said the interviews revealed that many of the residents came from the same area in Mexico — the state of Puebla. “It seemed like many of them came to Red Bank to join family members or friends that were already there,” Ruiz said. “There seems to be a thing where one person will go to Red Bank from a family, and then another follows.”

Ruiz also said that it was not a challenge to get the participants to open up and tell their stories.

“I think people were feeling just glad to be heard, glad to be seen and asked of their stories,” he said. “I think it’s a community where people often feel sort of invisible.”

Hopefully, Ruiz said, he and Saracho will have a first draft of a play for the Crossing Borders Festival — an annual event, featuring original plays by Latino writers — in August.

To learn more about programs and events offered by the Two River Theater, visit www.tworivertheater.org.