

# Immigration story has award-winning ending

BY NICOLE BUCHANAN

Vanessa Jimenez came to the United States from Michoacan when she was 14 years old. Leaving behind her mother and her four younger brothers, Vanessa arrived with a desire to work and help provide a better life for her family.

Upon her arrival, Vanessa began working immediately at a company that produced aluminum. After several years, Vanessa applied to work at McDonald's because it allowed her to have a more flexible schedule. For many years, Vanessa worked two jobs to send as much money back as possible, in hopes of eventually bringing her entire family to the U.S.

As Vanessa was working two jobs to help her loved ones, she was unable to attend high school. Since she was here alone, she had no parent or guardian to help her enroll in school, but when she turned 18, Vanessa enrolled in ESL classes at Harper College in Palatine. This experience allowed Vanessa to eventually consider, pursue and achieve her high school equivalency diploma.

Vanessa joined the Bear Family McDonald's Restaurant group in 2017. She quickly demonstrated her readiness to take her own restaurant and became the general manager of the group's Wheeling location at 1355 Lake Cook Road. During her time at that restaurant, Vanessa achieved significantly improved business results and oversaw the restaurant while it went through a major remodel.

After Wheeling, Vanessa was eager to take on more responsibility and was moved to the Niles Bear Family McDonald's restaurant at 7969 N. Milwaukee Ave. Vanessa also helped that restaurant as it went through a remodel while achieving exceptional business results going into 2020.

Vanessa was not just an exceptional GM at work, but she was also attending school at Harper College, working towards a degree in Business Administration. In 2020, Vanessa was recognized as an Outstanding Restaurant Manager by McDonald's for her contributions in 2019. This award is given annually to the top 10% of McDonald's restaurant managers.

In 2020, Vanessa worked incredibly hard and studied very diligently. She focused on her business results and impressed everyone with the pursuit of her education. Vanessa inspired the team in her restaurant and the Bear Family with her commitment to excellence in every aspect of her life. In addition, during this time, Vanessa achieved her dream of becoming a homeowner!

In October 2021, Vanessa won the Ray Kroc Award, an accolade that recognizes the top performing McDonald's restaurant managers globally. Vanessa was named one



PHOTO: JAMES HARVEY

**VANESSA JIMENEZ** with her patch of General Managers, left to right, Supervisor, Aaron Weeks, General Managers- Alfonso Rojas, Agustin Lira, Vanessa Jimenez, Melio Lagunas, David Lopez

of 390 McDonald's managers around the world, from 60 markets, to receive this honor. The award represents the top 1% of restaurant managers and includes a cash prize and trophy.

McDonald's franchisees and regional management nominate restaurant managers for the Ray Kroc Awards to recognize those individuals who have led their team to outstanding business performance, reflect the culture and values of the McDonald's System, and reinforce McDonald's purpose to feed and foster their communities.

"I was speechless and overjoyed," Vanessa said. "I am truly delighted and thankful to have received this recognition. I feel so blessed to have the team I have. None of this would have been possible without this team that surrounds me daily.

"I am honored to be part of such an amazing company and family. My hard work and dedication paid off!" she said of winning this award.

David Bear, president of Bear Family Restaurants, said: "Vanessa was nominated because her results were exceptional. When looking across the operational metrics, community contributions and academic achievements, Vanessa was clearly deserving of this nomination. The passion and commitment she shows to her guests, her team, her colleagues and this family is inspiring."

Bear Family Restaurants is so proud of Vanessa for her amazing achievements - from her great results professionally, to earning her high school equivalency and her degree in Business Administration, to becoming a first time homeowner, as well as her significant contributions in the community - and for being recognized as one of the best McDonald's restaurant managers in the world!



PHOTO: CREDIT- MELISSA THORSEN

**VANESSA JIMENEZ** promoting the Archways to Opportunities Program that McDonald's Offers, that helped pay for her college tuition.