

Illegal Aliens Rewards of good citizenship

Resident status not enough for many immigrant families

By **MARIANNE BIASOTTI**
Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — Maria De Lourdes Hurtado and her husband Martin have jobs, high school diplomas and recently bought their first home after living in a small trailer for years.

Just one thing is missing in the Watsonville couple's pursuit of the American dream: U.S. citizenship.

The couple is part of the wave of 3.5 million immigrants nationwide who received resident legal status through the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, commonly known as "amnesty." It afforded legal status to illegal immigrants who had lived in the U.S. since 1982.

But for the Hurtados and hundreds like them in Santa Cruz County, mere resident status is not enough.

They have been taking English and citizenship classes for five years. It's not easy, especially while juggling a job, rearing three children and keeping up with house payments.

Maria Hurtado attends classes in the morning while her sister watches Hurtado's three daughters. Six months out of the year she works full time at the Smucker's factory and attends class at Radcliff Adult and Watsonville High schools afterward from 6:30-9:30 p.m. During that time, Martin, 30, a machine operator at Monterey Mushrooms, takes care of the children. Both Maria and

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Martin are former field workers. For applicants such as Maria, 27, the benefits of citizenship far outweigh the struggle. The main advantage is someday being able to bring her family in Mexico to the United States.

Hurtado will be able to apply to bring her parents, brothers and sisters into the country the day she becomes a citizen, sometime in 1995.

The shortest wait is for citizens' spouses, and children under 21; they can immigrate to the country in six months. For a citizen's parents, it takes one year. The wait for siblings is considerably longer — 13 years, according to Jane Yokoyama of the Santa Cruz County Immigration Project.

For some, citizenship makes it easier to get a job. Watsonville resident Rosario Quintero, 22, is the first of seven brothers and sisters to go to college. She is studying to become a police officer.

"The job I want requires me to become a citizen, so I need to do it," Quintero said.

Citizenship also means "having a voice," said Quintero.

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Maria De Lourdes Hurtado keeps up with house payments and three children.

Border Patrol drive-by called intimidation

By **MARIANNE BIASOTTI**
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SANTA CRUZ — Less than a day after being told their immigration sweeps were disruptive and discriminatory, Border Patrol officers cruised Beach Flats in a gesture community leaders charge was meant to intimidate.

A Border Patrol van drove through Beach Flats on Dec. 17, the morning after a meeting in Castroville during which members of a regional task force told immigra-

tion officials that neighborhood sweeps by the INS were arbitrary and created chaos.

Gloria Nieto, a Beach Flats community activist and task force member, said the INS visit was the agency's way of "reminding people who's in charge."

At the Dec. 16 meeting of the immigration task force, first formed by former Rep. Leon Panetta and revived by Rep. Sam Farr, INS officials said they would try to be responsive to local communities while enforcing the law.

Farr asked INS officials: "Would you give up the civilian raids ... and work with local law enforcement so they can determine what criminal element is in their community instead of a federal force?"

Chris Wells, agent in charge of the Salinas Border Patrol station, later told the task force: "We've constantly tried to make ourselves available to local law enforcement agencies."

But the morning after the meeting "may not have been an appropriate time" to do

an unannounced drive-by in Beach Flats, Farr said through his press secretary, Chris Robichaux.

"The congressman is disappointed that it occurred," Robichaux said.

Santa Cruz Mayor Scott Kennedy also questioned the timing of the show of force.

"Why do they choose to do their job at this time and this place? Santa Cruz gets more than its share of enforcement," Ken-

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Dream of citizenship

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Her 21-year-old brother, Valente, also plans to become a citizen when he qualifies under amnesty next year.

"I have spent more time living here than in Mexico and I don't think we're returning to Mexico," he said. "And we can make a better life here."

Not all immigrants who received permanent residency under the amnesty law will seek citizenship. Some say they don't have time to study English; they're not sure how citizenship will benefit them.

"I have four children and I have to work because I have no other way of supporting them," said Watsonville resident Librada De La Torre.

At night, De La Torre is busy preparing meals, washing clothes and helping her children with homework. Even if she did have time to go to class, De La Torre said, there would be no one to watch her children.

"I don't understand much about this, and I don't know what the benefits are to being a citizen," she said.

Many immigrants who received their permanent resident status under the amnesty program are scared off by misinformation about what it takes to become a citizen, according to local agencies that help immigrants.

Among the more popular myths is that people must stomp on the Mexican flag before they take their oath of allegiance, or must promise to join the Army if they become citizens.

Yokoyama said much of her job time is spent debunking those beliefs.

"There are a lot of people who are afraid of taking that step because of misinformation," Yokoyama said. "The concern for a lot of young people is military service."

Maria Hurtado said better efforts must be made to educate candidates for citizenship.



'There are a lot of people who are afraid of taking that step because of misinformation.'

— Jane Yokoyama

"There are a lot of things people don't know," she said. "There should be some publicity explaining to them their benefits and telling them they're not going to go to war and things like that."

Immigrant advocates have offered suggestions to U.S. Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel, including broadcasting free public service announcements on television to advertise the benefits of becoming a citizen and how to apply.

Radcliff Adult School teacher John Basor invites Yokoyama and other experts to speak to his "English as a Second Language" classes, and to sell the benefits of becoming a citizen.

"If they supplied adult schools and community organizations with literature about becoming a citizen, maybe more people would do it," Basor said.

Would-be citizens are required to pass a written U.S. history test and an informal verbal exam of their English-speaking skills.

The American civics portion of the test requires time and preparation.

Questions commonly asked include: What is the minimum voting age? (18); How many amendments are there in the U.S. Constitution? (27); and, How many Supreme Court justices are there? (9).

Immigration and Naturalization Service officials say inability to speak English sufficiently

during the interview conducted after an applicant passes the written exam accounts for the majority of denials.

In Watsonville, where Spanish commonly is spoken on the streets, the citizenship test is an added incentive to learn English.

"Learning English ... will help me get a better job, earn more money and better my life," Hurtado said.

"(But) the disadvantage is there's not a strongly felt need to learn English because you can get along in Watsonville speaking Spanish," said Claudia Grossi, vice principal of Radcliff Adult School. "We have a strong barrier to learning (English)."

Once an applicant clears the hurdles to becoming a citizen, he or she is sworn in during a ceremony at the INS office in San Jose.

Area immigration workers would like to see the fanfare moved to Santa Cruz County.

"Many say 'we're the majority of the population of Watsonville but we can't vote,'" said Basor, a native of the former Yugoslavia whose commitment to educating future citizens is personal.

"I enjoy teaching the citizen classes because I went through the process myself. I want to vote and be a member of society. If you aren't, I think you're missing things."

INS presence

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nedy said. "It intimidates people, which I think is their purpose. They can't achieve their mission, so they settle for intimidating and frightening people."

Santa Cruz Police Chief Jack Bassett said, "It seems (INS officials) were receiving a different message from Congressman Farr than we did."

Border Patrol officials told Farr's office they were passing through Beach Flats while transporting two out-of-county illegal immigrants to a regional detention center, according to Robichaux.

Border Patrol officials were unavailable for comment Wednesday and Thursday.

Bassett, who told the task force that he repeatedly has asked INS officials to notify his department when they come to town, almost predicted the incident the night before it happened.

"We've discussed this before and I don't know what happens, but the next day I get phone calls (reporting an INS action)," he said at the meeting.

Bassett suggested the INS come up with a strategy to "better enforce the criminal element" in the

immigrant community, rather than making arbitrary sweeps in neighborhoods such as Beach Flats.

Kennedy, also a member of the task force, said the INS "has been totally indifferent to the needs of our local community and local law enforcement."

"It's up to local police to have to clean up after (the INS)," Kennedy said. The city's police department has concentrated on building trust in the Beach Flats neighborhood, where "people come from countries where police run amok of respecting laws or due process," he said.

The incident has weakened Nieto's desire to participate on the task force, which was meant to be an open forum to address issues on INS enforcement and citizenship.

"How can I, in good conscience, come to the table to speak on these issues when the people I serve are penalized for my free speech?" Nieto said.

The INS drive-by is expected to be a topic of conversation when Farr meets with INS officials Jan. 4, Robichaux said.