

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY JOB CENTER
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Kurt Ellison

Adviser Jon Silver explains pitfalls of immigration law to an attentive audience.

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Immigration law

Illegals face bewildering maze of paperwork

(Last of a four-part series on the new immigration law and its effects in this area.)

By ALEXANDRA HAYNE
STAFF WRITER

special report

Imagine that you had to prove to the government — with verifiable documents — who you are, where you've lived for the last five years and that you're healthy and able to make a living.

Think of the schools you've attended, the jobs you've held, the places you've lived, maybe even the brushes with the law, and that time you were laid off.

You'd need to contact dozens, maybe scores of people, ask them for letters and other documents, then collect everything and fill out a six-page government form.

Then imagine that for the past five years you had been making every effort to conceal your identity, your residence and your contacts with any and all official agencies.

That little scenario is exactly what is facing thousands of illegal immigrants as they apply or prepare to apply to the Immigration and Naturalization Service for legal residency under the immigration-reform law passed last November.

The task would be cumbersome enough for an English-speaking U.S. citizen, but for illegal aliens who speak little or no English and whose official personal history has been deliberately sketchy, the prospect is little short of frightening. It means they need help and lots of it.

Fortunately, help is available at social service agencies, churches and law offices. But along with the many legitimate helping agencies has come a range of people hoping to cash in on the confusion.

The Pajaro Valley and Santa Cruz area have not seen a great influx of carpetbaggers, perhaps because the illegal community here is more sophisticated and better informed than others, but there are some pitfalls that immigrants might want to avoid.

People working with illegal immigrants through the Santa Cruz County Immigration Project, Migrant Media Education Project, the INS and some lawyers' offices all have said that the major complaint they hear is that some lawyers charge too much for their services.

Other problems surfacing are misleading advertisements, doctors charging too much for the required medical examination and unqualified people, such as notaries and bookkeepers, holding themselves up as immigration experts.

Cruz Gomez, director of the Migrant Media Education Project in downtown Watson-

ville, said she had heard stories of lawyers charging \$2,000 and \$3,000 per person while making the clients collect all the documents themselves.

At Migrant Media, Gomez and her staff hold information sessions and counsel people about their cases. Most people can get the help they need from the various social service agencies, Gomez said.

"But the people who have problems definitely should be going to lawyers," she said. "We screen for that. If you have a problem, you should go to a lawyer."

Problems that might send somebody looking for a lawyer include a criminal record, a pending immigration hearing or detention by the INS after last Nov. 6, or a record of overuse or misuse of government welfare services, Gomez said.

If an immigrant does decide to go to a lawyer, Gomez advises going to some-

one known and trusted in the community. Migrant Media makes referrals to lawyers known to the staff there, she said. Prices in the range of \$500 to \$600 for the first person in a family, and reduced rates for the spouse and children, are available.

Betsy Allen, a paralegal who works out of Santa Cruz lawyer Tom Krueger's office, charges \$500 for the first family member and \$200 each for the rest. She said she does all the work: writing letters, collecting the documents, filling out the forms.

Her advice to people looking for lawyers is, "First ask how much they charge."

She said she tries to send people who do not really need the services of a lawyer to the social service agencies, which charge considerably less. But some people just feel better letting a lawyer handle things, she said.

After clients ask how much the lawyer charges, she said, they should then pay attention to how much time the lawyer spends with them and what kinds of questions the lawyer asks.

"If they spend ten minutes and say they'll get back to you, beware," she said.

As lawyers and others have sought to jump on the amnesty bandwagon, leaflets from out-of-town lawyers and advertisements on radio and television and in newspapers have become common. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with advertising, some of the ads have been misleading.

"The latest ad is telling people they have only 30 days to apply," Gomez said.

Although it was true that one category of illegal immigrant — those facing deportation proceedings after Nov. 6, 1986 — did have only 30 days to apply for legal residency, the vast majority have at least a year.

Jon Silver, of the Santa Cruz County Immigration Project, said he thought people should be wary of

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Where to get help

Below are listed the services provided locally to illegal immigrants seeking to apply for legal status under the new legalization programs. The names of agencies, phone numbers and names of some directors are included. Wherever possible to ascertain, cost has been listed.

● **Fingerprinting and driving records:** Department of Motor Vehicles, 90 Alta Vista Ave., Watsonville. For appointments call 724-0694. Fees for fingerprints are \$5. New licenses cost \$10. Services are generally offered at about 8 a.m.

● **Social Security cards, records:** Social Security Administration, 30 E. Fifth St., Watsonville. For

appointments call 722-7141. Costs of record verification vary. A copy of the latest information on record costs \$15.

● **Unemployment records:** Employment Development Department, 567 Arthur Road, Watsonville. For appointments call 724-7545. Copies of information are free.

● **School records:** Pajaro Valley school district, Child Welfare and Attendance Office, 519 Main St. (upstairs in the La Manzana building), Watsonville. For information call 728-6428. No cost.

● **Physicals:** Salud Para la Gente health clinic, 10 Alexander St., Watsonville. For appointments call 728-0222. Costs range from \$50 to \$70; See WHERE page 9 ▶

forecast

Fog and drizzle tonight. Partial clearing Sunday. Details page 9.

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anyone who advertises.

"I am just skeptical," he said. "To me it seems closest to ambulance-chasing. The good attorneys who do immigration don't need to advertise."

Silver advises clients who have already paid a lawyer a lot of money but who don't think they are getting the service to ask the lawyer to account for his time and map out what he has done. If the client isn't satisfied, he should look for another lawyer.

"The big fight is trying to get some of the money back," Silver said.

Apart from lawyers who charge too much or who don't have much experience with immigration, some complaints have been heard about notaries, bookkeepers and tax preparers who are now offering to help with immigration papers.

"I hear there are people passing themselves off as immigration experts," Gomez said. "People have traditionally gone to notaries for letter-writing. Some (notaries) are trying to provide a service. Others are rip-off artists."

Tom Maddry, chief legalization officer in the Salinas INS office, said that asking a notary or tax preparer to help with the forms isn't necessarily a bad idea.

He hadn't seen enough applications filled out by these people to comment on

the quality of their work, he said, "but they are experienced in preparing government forms."

What he has heard, however, is that at least one doctor is charging more than the usual \$50 to \$100 for medical examinations. Doctors sign contracts with the INS to provide the exams, Maddry said, but the contract doesn't contain anything about prices.

"If there is more than one doctor available," Maddry said, "look for the better price."

One thing Maddry said illegal immigrants didn't have to be wary of is the INS office.

"I would urge all of them to come on in and make application," he said. "If they are not eligible, we will simply tell them they are not eligible and send them on their way. If I turned this information over to the Border Patrol or immigration inspectors, I would go to jail."

Those who work in the illegal community here say that it is better organized than most and more stable because many illegal immigrants have been settled here for years. The people therefore are less prey to sharpies out to make a few bucks off the new law.

Silver, of the Immigration Project, said that scams are successful where people don't know their rights, but the well-informed are less easily taken in and more able to make good decisions.

Where to get help

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Doctors on Duty, 40 Penny Lane, Watsonville, and 615 Ocean Street, Santa Cruz. For appointments call 722-1444 or 425-7991. Costs range from \$50 to \$89. Watsonville Health Center, 9 Crestview Drive, Watsonville. For appointments call 761-4030. Cost: \$60-\$65 for adults and \$40-\$50 for children.

Santa Cruz Health Center, 1080 Emeline Ave., Santa Cruz. For appointments call 425-2551. Cost: \$60-\$65 for adults and \$40-\$50 for children. Westside Community Health Center, 1700 Mission St., Santa Cruz. For appointments call 425-5028. Cost: \$60-\$65 for adults and \$40-\$50 for children.

Woman's Health Center, 250 Locust St., Santa Cruz. For appointments call 427-3500. Cost: \$60-\$65 for adults and \$40-\$50 for children. La Plazita Medical Center, 410 Main St., Watsonville. For appointments call 728-0551. Cost for adult is \$75 (extra for X-rays); for children, \$60.

For general information and other assistance, the following agencies should be contacted:

● **Migrant Media Education Project**, 101 E. Beach St., Watsonville. Director: Cruz Gomez — 724-2997.

● **Catholic Social Services**, 21 Brennan St., Watsonville.

Director: Ernesto Lopez — 722-2675.

● **California Rural Legal Assistance**, 3 Williams Road, Salinas. Directors: Juan Arranga and Lidia Villareal — 757-5221.

● **Santa Cruz County Immigration Project**, 406 Main St., Suite 217, Watsonville. Director: Maura P. Emanuel — 724-5667. (The project sponsors free, bilingual seminars on the immigration law each Wednesday at 7 p.m. at the offices of the Migrant Media Center and Thursdays at 7 p.m. at Assumption Church, 100 Salinas Road, Pajaro.)

● **Community Action Board of Santa Cruz County Inc.**, 323 Spreckels Drive, Aptos. Director: Christine Johnson-Lyons — 662-3616.

● **Center for Employment Training (CET) Job Training Center**, 26 Menker St., Watsonville. Director: Jose Fernandez — 728-4551.

● **Immigration and Naturalization Service**, 947 Blanco Road, Salinas. Director: Tom Maddry (no public number, must apply in person). INS Hotline — 1-800-777-7700.

● **Lutheran Social Services**, 95 Alta Vista Ave., Watsonville. Director: the Rev. Bill Ruth. For information call the Rev. Carlos Hernandez at 724-0176.

● **Ag Help, Farm Bureau**, 1077 Terven Ave., Salinas. Director: Patricia Arnold — 758-1211, 758-1252, 758-1253.