THE PRESS-ENTE

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KARIN HIRTA / THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Soutsakhone Xaysiphanthong, 17, of Banning, at left, translates for her mother, Ae, and her father, Bounta, who are Laotian refugees.

Between two worlds

Many Inland children are their immigrant families' English translators

BY SHARYN OBSATZ
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Growing numbers of Inland children know the frustration of being pulled out of school or away from the television to help translate for their parents at hospitals, banks and other public places.

CENSUS 2000

But several of these young "language brokers" also say translating has helped them improve their English and native tongue while bringing them closer to their parents.

Census 2000 estimates released today show a significant increase in Inland households in which adults struggle with English.

"Society is more likely to see children in the role of language brokers because of the increase in linguistic minority families in the Inland Empire," said Raymond Buriel, a Pomona College psychology and Chicano studies professor who lives in Riverside. "Wherever the economy's good, you see more immigration and you see more children in that role."

GREG VOUTAS / THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Mihai Louis Daniel, 6, gathers tomatoes in his San Bernardino back yard with his Romanian immigrant grandmother Mandar Gabriela, for whom he occasionally serves as translator.

Closer bonds

Buriel has studied children who translate for their parents, including students in the Riverside Unified School District. He found that young language brokers do better academically and develop closer bonds with their families.

"It also gives them insight into their parents," Buriel said. He said teens would say, "I found out that my dad had cancer, that my dad had heart disease, (things) that my brothers and sisters did not know."

Census estimates show about

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CENSUS: New social, economic and housing data released. BACKPAGE

ONLINE: Here's how to access the new census data. BACKPAGE

DIGITAL EXTRA

CENSUS 2000:
Details on the census and the changing complexion of the Inland Empire
www.pe.com/digitalextra

Struggling with English

The 2000 census charted a jump in the number of inland households in which no one age 14 or older spoke English "very well." The Census Bureau refers to these households as "linguistically isolated."

	Riverside County	San Bernardino County	Moreno Valley	Highland	Temecula	Loma Linda	Mira Loma	Bloomington	Grand Terrace	Hemet
Households isolated by language	35,393	36,683	4,779	1,666	1,355	1,484	487	641	221	1,230
1990-2000 increase in total households	28%	14%	12%	18%	99%	23%	2%	11%	8%	40%
1990-2000 increase in households isolated by language	65%	64%	328%	309%	303%	303%	299%	264%	3578%	336%

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

ENGLISH: Translating makes children feel more important

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a 46 percent increase in the number of "linguistically isolated" households in Riverside and San Bernardino counties since 1990.

More than 72,000 foreign-language-speaking households reported having no one age 14 or older who could speak English "very well." That's about 7 percent of households in the two counties.

About two-thirds of youths ages 5 to 17 in foreign-language-speaking households speak English "very well," compared with half of adults, according to census data.

Banning teen Soutsakhone Xaysiharthong grew up translating for her Laotian refugee parents at McDonald's, the doctor's office and school events.

"All I knew was I was translating and helping my parents out. It made me feel older than I was," said Soutsakhone, now 17. "It gave me more responsibility. I was not going to be your average little American girl. It was just something that needed to be done."

Soutsakhone's parents, who came to the United States in 1986, work at a Palm Springs plastics factory and have grown more fluent in English. The last time the teen translated for them was a month ago, when a phone bill arrived with confusing extra charges.

In Banning, language-isolated households grew by 80 percent between 1990 and 2000. But isolation decreased for Asian-language-speaking households. Many families, including Soutsakhone's, have been in the United States for 15 years or more.

Stressful for young minds

Experts say children usually start translating between the ages of 8 and 10. They often find it stressful, said Robert Weisskirch, assistant professor of human development at Cal State Monterey Bay.

"They're forced to interpret not just the words but also the meaning," said Weisskirch, whose study of 36 Orange County fifth-grade translators was published this month in the Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences. At a parent-teacher conference, for example, a child might be challenged to understand and convey to the parent that a sibling is at risk of being "retained," or held back, he said.

Young language brokers are essential to life in integrated places, including the Inland area, Weisskirch said. "There are (other) areas of California where an adult can function and speak Spanish all of the time."

Rialto resident Adriana Agredano, 17, said she and her older sister translate for their stay-at-home mother, a Mexican immigrant. Agredano, a student at Chaffey College in Rancho Cucamonga, said she gets frustrated because her mother knows some English but is reluctant to use it.

Esther Hernandez, Agredano's co-worker at West Valley Medical Clinic in Colton, said for years she depended on her children's translations.

But one day the Colton resident's oldest son, Christian, asked why she wasn't learning English, suggesting that she would learn Chinese if she moved to China.

Hernandez, originally from Mexico, learned English in the 1980s by reading her children's English books and by watching "Fantasy Island," "Gilligan's Island" and cartoons on television.

In 1991, she was fluent enough to study to become a medical assistant.

"If you speak English, you have a better job," Hernandez said. She said her eldest son is happy, too — being bilingual earned him more pay and a better position with his employer.

Bilingualism common

Spanish-speaking households make up 78 percent of all language-isolated households in the Inland counties, census data show.

Bilingualism is the norm, however, with nearly four out of five Spanish-speaking households having at least one teen or adult who speaks English well.

Boriel, the Pomona College professor, criticized the census term "linguistic isolation," which he said emphasizes a negative view of language diversity.

He pointed to past generations of immigrants whose children were translators and went on to have great success in America.

Language diversity helps people in the United States understand people from other countries and do business with people from other countries, he said.

Romanian immigrant Mihai Daniela, 30, of San Bernardino said her son is proud to be the occasional translator for his father and grandmother.

Her husband, construction worker Mihai Rodin, understands a lot of English but sometimes relies on their 6-year-old son, Louis Daniel, to translate a news flash on television. The kindergartener also helps his 53-year-old grandmother, Mardar Gabriela, order at restaurants.

"It makes him feel important," his mother said.

Reach Sharyn Obsatz at (909) 888-9488 or sobsatz@pe.com

PETER PHUN / THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Yesenia Agredano, 19, left, and sister Adriana, 17, of Rialto translate for their Mexican immigrant mother.

Census releases varied data

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

The U.S. Census Bureau released new social, economic and housing data today based on the 2000 census long form mailed to one of every six homes.

The data are estimates based on a 52-item questionnaire. The form was filled out by 16,000 households in Riverside County and 11,000 households in San Bernardino County.

The estimates provide the first detailed racial and ethnic comparisons in areas such as income, work, schooling, disability, poverty and housing costs.

The estimates also allow for comparisons among states, counties, cities and neighborhoods.

Here's the way to check data for your area

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Want to know how many homeowners and renters there are in your neighborhood? Or how many neighborhood residents are younger than 18?

Recently released census data can tell you. Here's how to find it:

- Go to the American FactFinder home page, **factfinder.census.gov**
- Click the "Enter your street address" link at upper left corner of the page.
- Type in your address, city, state and ZIP code and click on GO.
- On the scrolling menu, highlight Census tract and the tract number. Click on "map it" to see a map of the tract, or click on GO to see a list of links for census data about the tract. (For some census tracts, data also is available by block. To access, highlight the block and block number shown on the scrolling menu.)
- Scroll down to "Search results" and click on the link or links for the data you want to see.

Recovering their culture

SPANISH: Inland Latinos who have spoken only English strive to master the language of their ancestors.

BY SHARYN OBSATZ
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

SAN BERNARDINO—Victoria Echols sat at the kitchen table with her great-aunt, who was frail from cancer.

Echols wanted so badly to say something kind, something comforting. But the language barrier silenced her.

"The only thing I could do was hold her hand, hug her and tell her I loved her," said Echols, a 22-year-old Colton resident. "It was so hard."

Echols had never learned Spanish, the language of her great-aunt, grandparents and great-grandparents — Mexican immigrants who came to work the fields of California in the 1920s.

The frustration pushed Echols to enroll in a conversational Spanish class at a community college, where she found other Hispanics trying to recover words lost over the generations.

Experts across the country report that a growing number of second- and third-generation Latinos are hitting the books to learn the language of their ancestors.

DAVID BAUMAN / THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Victoria Echols of Colton, whose grandparents and great-grandparents immigrated to California from Mexico in the 1920s, never learned Spanish. She has enrolled in a Spanish class at San Bernardino Valley College.

"An awakening"

"I think there's an awakening among Hispanics regarding the importance of Spanish," said Fred Diaz, 67, a Spanish-language instructor from Riverside who teaches Echols' class at San Bernardino Valley College.

Many Latino families with long histories in the United States have lost their native language through intermarriage, moves to ethnically mixed suburbs or schooling that once banned or discouraged Spanish, language experts say.

The Latinos' situation is not unique, according to researchers who trace language losses among other early immigrant waves, be they Eastern European Jews whose grandchildren can't understand Yiddish folk songs or Italian immigrants whose descendants struggle to read a restaurant menu.

But the recent Latino immigration boom has made Spanish more popular — even hip — as its influence spreads into pop music, fast-food advertising and presidential speeches.

A 2000 Census Bureau survey estimates that nearly 26 percent of California residents age 5 and older speak Spanish at home. Riverside and San Bernardino counties are 38 percent Hispanic, but local language statistics won't be released until next year.

Some second-, third- and fourth-generation Latinos say they find themselves expected to speak Spanish and feel ashamed that they cannot.

There are no national statistics showing how many Latinos are taking Spanish classes, experts say. But Diaz said more Hispanic students are taking his classes at Riverside Community College and San Bernardino Valley College. Professors at other colleges and universities report similar trends.

Spanish's appeal

Inland Latinos who take Spanish classes cite a variety of motivations for their studies. Some hope to land better jobs, to rediscover their heritage or to be able to converse with Spanish-speaking relatives.

Echols said her San Bernardino-born mother never learned Spanish as a child because she spent much of her time with black neighbors while her widowed mother was cleaning houses to support the family.

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SPANISH

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Echols, a single mother studying to be a bilingual paralegal assistant, is teaching her three children Spanish words as quickly as she learns them in Diaz's class.

"On Saturday mornings, they greet me in Spanish. I ask them if they're hungry, if they want 'leche' (milk)," she said. Echols hopes it will be easier for her children to learn the language while they are young.

Classmate Stella Sandoval hopes knowing Spanish will help her land a better secretarial job.

"They always ask me (whether I speak Spanish) and I always say 'no' so they end up hiring somebody else," said Sandoval, 43, of Colton.

Best friends Diane Hernandez and Lidia Fausto, both of San Bernardino, say curiosity led them to take the class together.

Hernandez, 26, said they want to be able to eavesdrop on conversations at family gatherings, on the job or at restaurants.

"We just love to be in everybody's business," Fausto, 24, agreed, laughing.

They also said they feel bothered when people ask why they don't speak Spanish.

Fausto said her father teases her about it, even though it was his idea to move the family from a heavily Latino neighborhood in Orange County to a more ethnically mixed neighborhood in San Bernardino. Growing up, she said, "mainly my friends were white and black," so learning Spanish "wasn't a big priority."

Her classmate Gloria Stephenson, speaking Spanish is a way to reverse her grandfather's denial of his Mexican roots.

Stephenson, an aspiring court interpreter whose mother is Mexican-American and father is Swedish-American, said her maternal grandfather refused to teach his family Spanish because he did not want them to be associated with Mexican "gang bangers" and "drug dealers" he saw in Los Angeles.

Stephenson, a 39-year-old single mother from Colton, said she tells her children that no one should be ashamed of speaking Spanish.

"All languages are a gift from God," she said.

Lost over generations

Experts have identified several reasons why Latino families lose Spanish over time, including intermarriage, schooling and socializing with non-Spanish speakers.

Cecilia Rodriguez Pino, a Spanish-language professor in New Mexico, finds that her Latino students' earliest memorable Spanish experiences were not with their parents, but with their grandmothers in the kitchen, talking about food.

Many older Latino parents still remember being punished for speaking Spanish in school, said Rodriguez Pino, who teaches Spanish for Native Speakers courses at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces.

"They were taken to the principal's office and paddled," she said. "We became very protective of our kids," trying to spare them by not teaching them Spanish.

Retiree Richard Ruiz, 58, a lifelong Redlands resident whose grandparents emigrated from Mexico, recalls a Redlands High School teacher catching him speaking Spanish to another student during their lunch hour more than 40 years ago.

The teacher chewed him out but a few minutes later praised a couple of "Anglo" students practicing their Spanish for class, Ruiz protested.

"I jumped up and said some wrong things," he said. "I guess I got sent home, and they threatened to expel me."

Debate continues about bilingual education and whether schools should encourage or discourage children from speaking their native language at home and at school.

For decades, educators told parents that speaking to their children in their native language would confuse them, said Joyce Peyton, coordinator of the nonprofit Heritage Language Initiative in Washington, D.C. She said research has shown that children in other countries grow up speaking two languages with ease.

Even without English in the home, immigrant children will push themselves to learn English at school, Peyton said.

"Kids want to fit in. Very early on, they notice the language of this country, the language of 'being cool,' is English," she said.

Most schools no longer punish students for speaking Spanish, Peyton said, but some parents still worry "if their children speak with a Spanish accent, they'll be placed in lower-level classes."

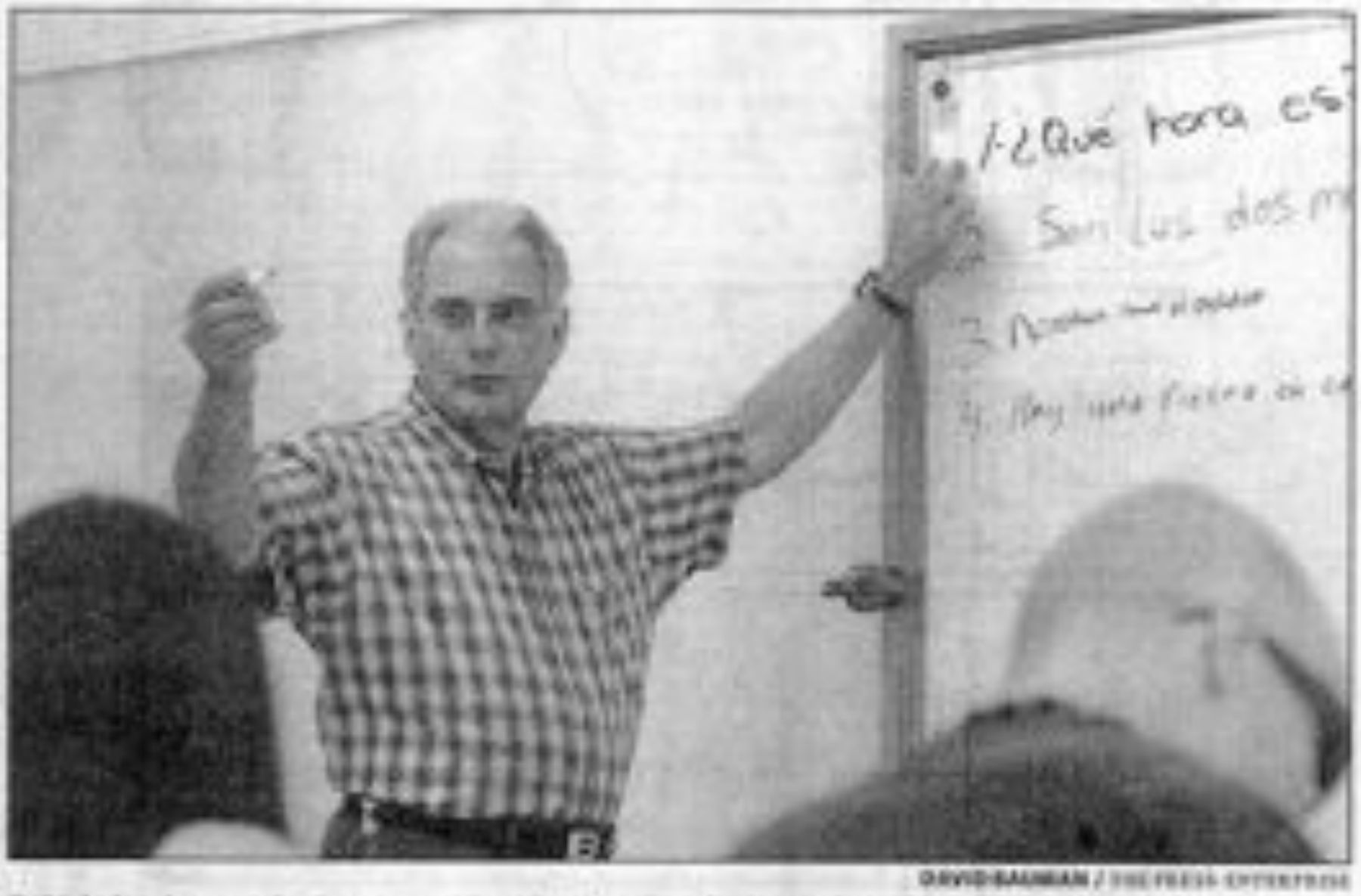
Preservation efforts

People are working at many levels to preserve Spanish and other native languages, Peyton said. She pointed to ongoing efforts within families, at public schools or universities and through community-based programs, ranging from Korean heritage groups to American Indian tribal language projects.

"If we recognize it as a resource, instead of as a problem, then we can develop it," Peyton said.

Corona grandfather Javier Ramirez, who emigrated from Mexico in 1977, plans to keep Spanish alive in his family by using schoolbooks from Tijuana to teach his grandchildren how to read and write Spanish.

"We don't want to make the same mistake as those who came before us," he said.



DAVID BAUMAN / THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

"I think there's an awakening among Hispanics regarding the importance of Spanish," said Fred Diaz, who teaches Spanish class at San Bernardino Valley College and Riverside Community College.

Lidia Fausto, left, and Diane Hernandez of San Bernardino are among a growing number of Inland Latinos who are taking Spanish classes.

FOCUS

THE SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN
Sunday
NOVEMBER 21, 1999

As a Peace Corps volunteer, Sharyn Obsatz helped 6th-graders paint a world map on their school in the low income neighborhood of San Juan, San Lorenzo, Paraguay. The project's teen coordinator, Nuri, 16, was an elementary-school dropout who survived by living with her boyfriends.

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Corps Values

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SHARYN OBSATZ · THE NEW MEXICAN

We were sitting against the ruins of a bathroom wall in the vacant grass lot where Kitolo lived with two other street kids. It had started to drizzle. Kitolo, 15, was crying as we talked for two hours about what his dead mother would want for him in his life and how she would feel about him sleeping in the bushes and sniffing shoe glue. He considered going to live in a Catholic boys home nearby, where he could learn to read and practice a trade.

It felt like a breakthrough in my work with Kitolo, one of 250 kids working on the streets of the Paraguayan city of San Lorenzo, my U.S. Peace Corps assignment site in South America. We had never really talked like this before, and he hugged me when I left.

But throughout the following days, weeks and months, he said only about 10 words to me or shrugged when I visited him at the street corner where he washed the windows of cars and buses waiting at the stoplight. When I finished my two years of service in the Urban Youth Development program, Kitolo was still working on the streets and had taken up smoking marijuana daily with his friends.

This frustration, the frequent feelings of impotence, was one of the toughest things for me to accept during my Peace Corps service.

I had some successes too, and I'll tell more about them later. I'm still glad I went to Paraguay. I came home more mature, more realistic and feeling much more alive.

Kitolo, 15, washed windshields, slept in a vacant lot and talked about wanting a better life.

Like most volunteers, I joined the Peace Corps hoping to make the world a better place. At age 26, I had worked in journalism for four years, including three at *The New Mexican*, writing about teens in trouble, in gangs, running away from home, getting arrested, getting pregnant, dropping out of school, always pulling themselves down. I wanted to stop being an observer and start getting involved.

I had another newspaper job offer at the time my Peace Corps Service invitation arrived. Friends and coworkers argued that I had my whole life to sit behind a newsroom desk, now was the time to try the Peace Corps.

There are 50 volunteers from New Mexico currently serving in the U.S. Peace Corps, which offers agricultural, health, business, education and environmental projects in 78 developing countries throughout the world.

I was lucky; I'll admit it. The Urban Youth program differs from the image most people have of Peace Corps volunteers living isolated in mountain villages, stuck deep in the jungle or stranded in farming towns. I lived in a poor, dirt-road barrio of Paraguay's second-largest city. I had a tiny house in a family's back yard, with an indoor bathroom, cement floors and an electric hot-water shower contraption.

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CORPS

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I visited one of my fellow volunteers, a rural schoolteacher, after a thunderstorm. We had to walk through quicksand to the outhouse. One of her flip-flops disappeared in the muck.

City and country volunteers alike share their yards and streets with dogs, cows, horses, pigs and chickens. My neighbor's hen liked to lay her eggs in my outdoor sink, squawking loudly each summer afternoon while I was trying to sleep through the 104-degree heat.

I had electricity for a fan, but no heat in the winter, which means 40 degrees Farenheit can feel pretty cold getting out of the shower, even for a Minnesotan like myself.

The U.S. government gave me $200 a month in Paraguayan money to cover my $70 rent plus food, job supplies and bus fares. I splurged occasionally on sandwich cheese and Froot Loops.

To encourage grassroots development, Peace Corps puts only one volunteer in each community so that they are forced to interact more with their neighbors and rely on their friendship. I was the only U.S. citizen most of my neighbors had ever met.

I worked with school dropouts, potential leaders, children who worked on the streets and other teens in my barrio. I helped two Catholic youth groups win a grant to run a Saturday tutoring, recreation, health and free-lunch program for street kids. With neighbors, we set up youth groups, a girls craft group and a summer camp.

The Kids

I never wanted to teach English, but I did anyway because the teens in my neighborhood asked me to. Luis, 14, a school dropout whose mother died and whose father was an alcoholic, excelled in

Photos by Sharyn Obsatz/The New Mexican

The family of 14-year-old Raquel, far left, couldn't afford to send her to high school, so she volunteered as the neighborhood's librarian.

Peace Corps volunteer Sharyn Obsatz said her final goodbye to Mariela, a 9-year-old English student and

Peace Corps tips

■ **How to sign up:** To reach the regional recruiting office, call 1(800)424-8580.

■ **Preferences:** Peace Corps allows potential volunteers to pick general areas where they want to serve. I asked for a Spanish-speaking country and not a Middle Eastern country because I couldn't deal with the cultural chauvinism against women.

■ **Medical approvals:** Peace Corps lost my medical records during the application process and I had to wait an extra year for an assignment. Keep copies of everything. I avoided some costly testing for my occasional asthma by agreeing to an asthma-care restriction limiting the countries where I could serve.

■ **If you don't speak the language:** Peace Corps service includes three months of language training. Volunteers who didn't speak a word of Spanish when they arrived felt frustrated but finished their two years speaking fairly fluently.

■ **If you're a blonde woman:** Many countries have traditional views toward premarital sex, particularly for women. Expect to say little about your past and possibly stay celibate for two years. From watching television, they think U.S. women are easy, and volunteers get hit on or harassed often. It's worse for blondes.

■ **Minority volunteers:** Some ethnic-minority volunteers suffered through a lot of prejudice in Paraguay but most said they'd do it again anyway. Many volunteers who weren't Catholic had to lie about their religion to be accepted in their communities and get anything done. Gay and lesbian volunteers kept their sexual orientation hidden at their worksites.

■ **Money:** With the Peace Corps salary, it's nearly impossible to save money for travel or a new pair of shoes. In Paraguay, the best way to access money — only available in the capital city of Asuncion — was through a bank card or credit card from the states.

Sharyn Obsatz

insecure because their mother always called them "stupid" or "useless" and hit them at least once a day.

We talked about it, discussing other ways to discipline kids and places to get free medicine for parasites. I took one mother to talk to a social worker about her unruly children. I helped the city government organize workshops for teachers on how to detect child abuse and how to report it. While Paraguayan officials and educators focus on children's rights campaigns, most of the people I met believe it's OK for parents to hit their kids.

Social life

crazy. We spent hours talking on the brick patio as night fell and the mosquitoes started to bite.

I also traveled with friends and fellow volunteers to hidden waterfalls, breath-taking mountain lookouts and Buenos Aires night clubs. Our Christmas party one summer just got out of hand.

Was it worth it?

While I was gone, friends wrote prize-winning newspaper articles, met their future spouses, bought houses and drank a lot of really good coffee. I missed seeing my sister playing a fairy in her high

sleep through the 106-degree heat.

I had electricity for a fan, but no heat in the winter, which means 40 degrees Fahrenheit can feel pretty cold getting out of the shower, even for a Minnesotan like myself.

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To encourage grassroots development, Peace Corps puts only one volunteer in each community so that they are forced to interact more with their neighbors and rely on their friendship. I was the only U.S. citizen most of my neighbors had ever met.

I worked with school dropouts, potential leaders, children who surfed on the streets and other teens in my barrio. I helped two Catholic youth groups win a grant to run a Saturday tutoring, recreation, health and free-lunch program for street kids. With neighbors, we set up youth groups, a girls craft group and a summer camp.

The Kids

I never wanted to teach English, but I did anyway because the teens in my neighborhood asked me to. Luis, 14, a school dropout whose mother died and whose father was an alcoholic, excelled in class. I told him after class one day that he was lucky to have been born so intelligent and should do something with his smarts. He started night high school, paid for his own uniform and fees and stopped hanging around the drunken and rowdy group of guys in the neighborhood.

I met Nuri one night when she was drinking with friends at the neighborhood playground. She was 15, had dropped out in sixth grade, left home to avoid an abusive dad and basically was sleeping with men to have a place to live. She wasn't very proud of herself. We went to the family-planning folks at the health clinic and the nurses talked to her about protecting herself. That winter, she helped me lead sixth-graders painting a world map mural on a wall of their school in the barrio. She beamed when she saw a story about her map in the national newspaper.

Photos by Sharyn Obsatz, The New Mexican

The family of 14-year-old Raquel, far left, couldn't afford to send her to high school, so she volunteered as the neighborhood's librarian.

Peace Corps volunteer Sharyn Obsatz said her final goodbye to Marleia, a 9-year-old English student and neighbor, in August.

Raquel, 14, couldn't go to high school because her family had no money. She just stayed home all day watching telenovela soap operas. She joined a youth group I formed with the youth leader of a neighboring barrio and got invited to national youth conferences. She also became the librarian of a community library organized by mothers in the barrio with books sent by schoolchildren at my stepmother's elementary in Minnesota.

What I tried but failed to do:

I just loved waking up every morning for a week to find a different chewed up, poopy diaper on the front porch, a gift the neighbor's dog brought from the banks of the arroyo that runs through my neighborhood and by my house.

The diaper was tossed by my other neighbor, Antonia, who, despite discussions during our friendly ice-tea breaks each morning, preferred to throw her family's trash in the arroyo instead of walking 30 feet to the garbage bin.

She wasn't alone. Nearly half of my neighbors, some of them really nice and some of them really crabby, threw their trash in the arroyo daily. Then when it rained, the arroyo flooded and washed their trash into the homes of poorer families downstream. In the summer, I could smell the rotting garbage blocks away.

I helped some environmentally minded neighbors form a barrio commission and persuaded the city to extend garbage collection service to streets that dead-end in the arroyo. The commission is still active, the garbage service continues and the trash still flows downriver.

My other big frustration was the daily child abuse. With houses so close together, I couldn't help but see it, hear it and hate it. One neighbor bought beer instead of medicine to kill the worms living under the skin of his daughters' ankles.

Another neighbor staked her 4-year-old kid to the ground in the back yard like a dog because he disobeyed her. My neighbor girls were so cute but so insecure because their mother always called them "stupid" or "useless" and hit them at least once a day.

We talked about it, discussing other ways to discipline kids and places to get free medicine for parasites. I took one mother to talk to a social worker about her unruly children. I helped the city government organize workshops for teachers on how to detect child abuse and how to report it. While Paraguayan officials and educators focus on children's rights campaigns, most of the people I met believe it's OK for parents to hit their kids.

Social life

Single women don't really go out much in Paraguay, except in the capital city. In fact, volunteers don't have the money to go out much. I spent many nights listening to the radio and playing cards — Rummy 500 with friends or solitaire if alone. Most volunteers read about 100 books a year, favoring quick mysteries and escapist romance novels.

Every weekend, there's at least one fundraising festival or quinceaños birthday party in the neighborhood, where, of course, I'd have to behave like a saint.

Most volunteers find one or two people at their site they can relate to on a deeper level. I had great conversations with the Paraguayan family I lived with during training. Their cousin Ani was my age, a law student, a former reporter and doubly gay in a conservative Catholic country. We spent hours talking on the brick patio as night fell and the mosquitoes started to bite.

I also traveled with friends and fellow volunteers to hidden waterfalls, breath-taking mountain lookouts and Buenos Aires night clubs. Our Christmas party one summer just got out of hand.

Was it worth it?

While I was gone, friends wrote prize-winning newspaper articles, met their future spouses, bought houses and drank a lot of really good coffee. I missed seeing my sister playing a fairy in her high school's production of Midsummer Night's Dream. I missed watching my dad win a Minnesota award for his book. I just missed being with my family.

But I gained a broader perspective of the world through taking two years off from my career and my life in the United States. I became fluent in Spanish. I made new Paraguayan friends. I learned to work without supervision, to trust my judgment. I made myself get out of bed every day to do my job, even when things were rough, even if no one would have known the difference.

I realized how motivated I am to use my heart and brain to help teens make good decisions in their lives. One-third of the volunteers in my group ended their Peace Corps service early. I'm proud I stuck it out.

■ Medical approval: Peace Corps lost my medical records during the application process and I had to wait an extra year for an assignment. Keep copies of everything. I avoided some costly testing for my occasional asthma by agreeing to an asthma-care restriction limiting the countries where I could serve.

■ If you don't speak the language: Peace Corps service includes three months of language training. Volunteers who didn't speak a word of Spanish when they arrived felt frustrated but finished their two years speaking fairly fluently.

■ If you're a blonde woman: Many countries have traditional views toward

lot of prejudice in a emergency but most said they'd do it again anyway. Many volunteers who weren't Catholic had to lie about their religion to be accepted in their communities and get anything done. Gay and lesbian volunteers kept their sexual orientation hidden at their worksites.

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THE PRESS-ENTE

Saturday, September 14, 2002 Inland Southern California's Newspaper Since

Vandals turn desert deadly

John Hunter, left, and Larry LaPrevote look for signs of immigrants in Canbo Canyon.

JOHN FLORES / THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

John Hunter, 46, of Poway, center, checks water tanks with Larry LaPrevote, 42, left, of San Diego, and Anthony Benton, 17, of El Centro

Immigration project's liquid lifeline faces sabotage

BY SHARYN OBERTZ
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

OCOTILLO—On a recent Saturday, John Hunter kneeled down in the burning sand, cupped his hand and opened the spigot. He tasted warm water from a 55-gallon drum planted in the desert to keep migrants from dying of thirst in these dunes an hour's drive southwest of the Salton Sea.

"I want to make sure it hasn't been tampered with. If I'm putting the water out here, I want to make sure it's OK," Hunter said. The Riverside native organized the Water Stations project to help save the lives of undocumented immigrants crossing from Mexico into the Imperial Valley and eastern San Diego County.

Hunter has cause for concern.

This summer, vandals targeted 11 water tanks, knocking off the spigots, tipping drums and spilling the water on the ground. In June, a brother and sister were found dead of dehydration not far from a vandalized water station.

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Hunter and authorities suspect the vandals oppose the project, which has garnered national attention since it was founded two years ago to combat a mounting death toll.

U.S. Border Patrol statistics show more than 500 immigrants died from harsh weather, motor vehicle crashes and other causes in the San Diego and El Centro regions since Oct. 1, 1995. More than 1,300 migrants have died along the entire 1,933-mile southwestern border. Advocates say immigrants need water and compassion as they head north in search of better jobs and better lives.

But opponents of illegal immigration say undocumented migrants should stop crossing. Border Patrol agents say they support the humanitarian effort but fear the stations give false hope to immigrants embarking on the dangerous trek.

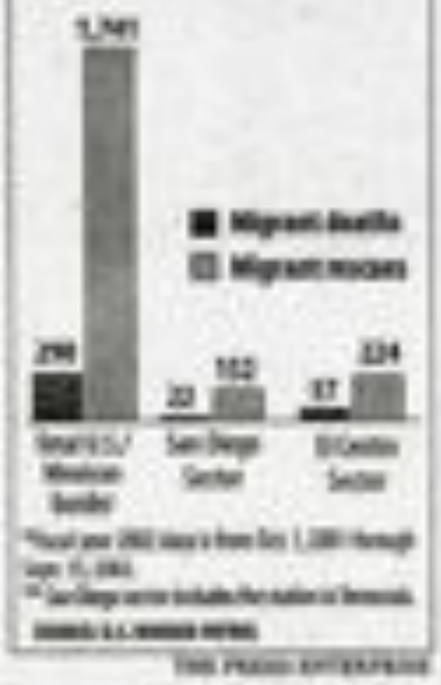
Desert deaths

Smuggling rings typically drop off immigrants near the

PLEASE SEE WATER, BACK PAGE

Dangerous crossing

In fiscal year 2002, hundreds of immigrants crossing the border died from cold and heat exposure, traffic crashes or other causes.



*Fiscal year 2002 data is from Oct. 1, 2001 through Sept. 11, 2002.
**San Diego sector includes Border stations in Temecula, Murrieta and Riverside.

SOURCE: U.S. BORDER PATROL

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

WATER

CONTINUED FROM A1

border. The migrants cross through harsh, rocky terrain. They walk for miles to a prearranged location to be picked up. But their hired guides sometimes get lost or abandon them.

Hunter, 46, a Poway resident, grew frustrated reading about migrant deaths in the paper.

"There was no one really trying to help them out," said Hunter, a scientist and inventor whose father, Robert Hunter, was a prominent Riverside-area builder and whose brother is Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-El Cajon. "The average person who has a decent life and likes themself would not let somebody die in front of them."

Hunter started the project in 2000. Now a dozen regular volunteers maintain 300 water stations scattered about a half-mile to 6 miles apart.

Donations pay for 1-gallon jugs of water, which are stacked in cardboard boxes and marked with blue flags. Hunter bought 55-gallon drums for heavily used water stations. Border Patrol agents and forest rangers help the group map the trails where migrants cross and sometimes die.

Volunteers from across Southern California gather each weekend to check and refill the stations, sometimes in temperatures near 120 degrees.

SILVIA FLORES / THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

John Hunter holds a global positioning system unit as he drives in the Carrizo Canyon area in Imperial County.

"Now we know how they feel, because almost every 20 minutes we'd get some water," said Eddie Baxter, 19, a Cal State San Bernardino student who volunteered with his brother Anthony this summer. Vandals drained several of the 55-gallon tanks sometime between June 28 and June 30.

"It's obviously an intentional act. It's a very remote road," said Jim McKenna, acting sergeant of the local San Diego County sheriff's station. But a delay in reporting the vandalism erased any prints, tire tracks or other clues.

Hunter has cut open the 55-gallon tanks, now using them as containers for 20 sealed, one-gallon jugs.

Perilous journey

Moreno Valley immigrant advocate Luz Maria Ayala estimates that 30 percent to 40 percent of her clients have crossed the deserted border. She said the Water Stations project is "inspired by God."

Jose Francisco Sanchez, a married father with two boys, is working with Ayala's organization to get his green card. But he nearly died on a June cross-border journey 15 years ago. Smugglers told his group the trek would take hours. But the guide led the crossers astray, stranding them in the desert for two days. One of the guides who left to get water never returned.

"It was hot as an oven, suffocating. There was nowhere to shade yourself from the sun," recalled Sanchez, 36, a Winchester handyman.

Of the 13 who embarked on the trek to California, only seven arrived, he said.

Opponents of illegal immigration say migrants are responsible for the risks they take.

It would be better for people in the long run to wait in their home countries for permission to immigrate legally, said Jim Bailey, a Lake Elsinore construction worker. "There's a lot of people trying to come here legally who are being stepped over."

The water project invites crossers, Bailey said. "I think it's sending a wrong message."

U.S. Border Patrol agent Dionicio Delgado applauds the effort to save lives. Delgado, spokesman for the El Centro region, blamed smugglers, who collect $1,500 to $2,000 a head, for enticing immigrants to cross.

Efforts continue

Border Patrol search-and-rescue teams, including agents from the Temecula station, have saved more than 1,740 people this fiscal year. The agency also enlisted Mexican pop stars to record warnings about the dangers of crossing.

Water station volunteers hope to secure money and government approval to set up an additional 700 water stations.

San Diego activist Enrique Morones Careaga joined the effort last year and set up winter stations with boxes of clothing, blankets, food and water.

Today, Morones plans to attend a memorial at the Holtville gravesites of more than 120 migrants who died crossing the border. He said only U.S.-Mexico immigration agreements will stop the deaths.

"We know this is not the solution," he said.

Reach Sharyn Obsatz at (909) 368-9458 or sobsatz@pe.com

The costs of fake IDs

CRIME: Inland authorities say illegal documents compromise security and disrupt lives.

BY SHARYN OBSATZ, DIANA CERVANTES AND JORGE ARIZMENDI-PEÑALOZA
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE/LA PRENSA

The Immigration and Naturalization Service plans to step up enforcement against false document sales in the Inland area amid heightened public security concerns.

Authorities have said they believe document traders across the country helped the hijackers in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks get driver licenses and other identification that they then used to open bank accounts, rent cars and sneak around the United States.

Since the attacks, the public has been phoning in more tips about such sales, the local INS office reports.

A few thousand false documents are bought and sold each year in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, estimates Jim Jones, assistant officer in charge of the INS office in San Bernardino. Hundreds of thousands of false documents are believed to be sold yearly in the Los Angeles area, making it the forgery hub of the West.

PENALTIES

Crime	Maximum penalty
Making, selling or possessing false immigration documents	5 years in prison and/or $250,000 fine
Accepting or paying a bribe for a real driver license	4 years in prison
Possessing a fraudulently obtained real license	4 years in prison and/or $10,000 fine
Possessing a counterfeit license	1 year in jail or prison time
Selling or manufacturing counterfeit licenses	4 years in prison

SOURCES: U.S. ATTORNEY'S OFFICE, CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

BLOCKING: DMV takes steps to prevent driver license fraud. **A5**

An underground market has thrived in Riverside, Indio, Corona, San Bernardino and other Inland spots, according to INS investigators. Jones said the Inland trade has remained constant over the years.

"Both counties are relatively big and we can't be everywhere," Jones said. "We're aware of several sites where they're selling. We've got more than one case in the pipeline. . . . We do the best we can with what we've got."

The Inland INS office is recruiting a supervisor and one enforcement agent to add to its enforcement staff of 10. Irene Martin, officer in charge of Inland INS operations, said she hopes the recently approved national defense plans will provide money to fill five other enforcement and criminal investigation jobs vacant long before Sept. 11.

Once the agents finish five months of academy training, Jones said, the public will see more arrests and undercover stings in the Inland area.

Documents for sale

Buyers usually find sellers by

PLEASE SEE **DOCUMENTS, A4**

DOCUMENTS: Issue comes amid growing security concerns

CONTINUED FROM A4

word of mouth, immigrants and investigators say. Sales locations — including a San Bernardino swap meet, a Corona supermarket and an empty lot behind a Riverside drug store — are well-known among immigrants.

Items sold include visas called green cards, or "micas" in Spanish, which affirm an immigrant's legal right to live in the United States. Driver licenses, birth certificates, work permits, Social Security cards and auto insurance verification cards are also available.

Now on the black market are phony auto insurance cards that cost about $30. Immigrants say the cards include a telephone number that is supposed to be answered by someone who will assure authorities that the cards are valid. In case of accidents, however, the cards carry no coverage.

Immigrants say a phony green card and a Social Security card together cost $80 — the same price as a work permit and Social Security card. A driver license costs $100 to $2,000 depending on its authenticity.

Buyers can pick the names, addresses and birth dates they want printed on their cards.

INS investigators say the Social Security numbers are often borrowed, stolen or invented.

Sellers direct buyers to photo shops for instant passport-size pictures, costing about $10. Buyers return the photos to the sellers and set up a time to pick up the finished documents, usually within 24 hours. The documents are sometimes left in a park or hidden in an agreed-upon palm tree.

Who is buying?

Many of the forgers' customers are illegal immigrants who need to show employers a work permit or Social Security number.

The black market also sells to minors who want to get into nightclubs and bars. Other buyers, mainly Americans, are trying to hide past criminal records or traffic violations, investigators said. A few buyers want to use other people's identities to steal from their accounts and take out loans. Other buyers hope to hide income from the IRS.

Immigrant advocates say demand for false IDs will endure as long as there are jobs for undocumented immigrants and little chance for them to become legal residents.

"It's not because (immigrants) are bad. These are good people who want to work, and sometimes there's no other way but to buy false cards and use someone else's Social Security number," said Luz Maria Ayala, a farmworkers' advocate in Perris.

Of the estimated 8 million illegal immigrants living in the United States, most cannot qualify for work permits unless the government grants them amnesty or allows them to legalize through a marriage or job-related program.

U.S. immigration restrictions limit the number of work and family visas available to people who want to immigrate legally. Mexicans and Filipinos sometimes wait as long as 14 years for visas, according to the INS.

Perris resident Galo Millan, 36, an immigrant from the Mexican state of Guerrero, said he borrowed a friend's Social Security number to get a job boxing eggs. He also used it to obtain a driver license. When he legalized in 1986, he no longer needed the false number.

"I never had problems (using the borrowed Social Security number)," said Millan, whose employer took taxes out of his paycheck. "I never filed for a tax refund. I don't know if my friend did either."

Who gets hurt?

Illegal immigrants may not intend to hurt the true owners of the Social Security numbers they use, Jones said. But they do cause problems, ranging from tax mix-ups to snafus for people going on workers compensation who find out that someone else is working using their Social Security number, he said.

"A lot of people look at it as a victimless crime, but it's not," Jones said.

Working parents Myra and Mike Dannewitz of San Jacinto found their 2000 tax refund tied up for six months because someone had stolen Mike Dannewitz's Social Security number and filed first for his refund. It took more than a dozen phone calls to government officials to straighten out the mess.

"I'd be on hold for an hour sometimes. It was frustrating," Myra Dannewitz said.

The couple, both big exterminators, had been counting on the money to pay off bills. Their refund arrived just before Halloween.

In another case, Mexican immigrant Jesus David Hermosillo found out his driver license was suspended last year after a former employee allegedly used Hermosillo's name and birthdate when stopped by police on a traffic violation and a DUI. Hermosillo's relatives said.

Hermosillo, here on a legal work permit, was living in Redlands and working with his sister and brother-in-law, Linda and Ray Carston, at their fountain company in Yucaipa.

The Carstons and court documents indicate that a police photo of the man did not look like Hermosillo. The thief was slim, 5-foot-6, with a long mustache. Hermosillo is 6 feet tall, stocky and clean-shaven.

PLEASE SEE DOCUMENTS, A6

GREG VOJTKO / THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Ray and Linda Carston, shown at their Yucaipa fountain business, say a relative was a victim of identity theft. Linda Carston said her brother, here legally on a work permit, had his driver license suspended after a former employee used his name and birthdate when receiving a DUI citation.

IDENTITY THEFT

For thieves, cash is no longer the most desirable thing in your wallet — they want your credit card, phone card and driver license information, investigators say. Some tips for protecting yourself:

- Never give out your Social Security number unless absolutely necessary.
- Do not give personal information on the phone, through the mail or over the Internet unless you initiated the contact or know the individual or organization.
- Review bank and credit card statements each month for fraudulent activity. Report any problems immediately to your bank or credit card company and local police.
- Deposit mail in post office mailboxes, not in your personal mailbox.
- Put passwords on your credit card, bank and phone accounts.
- Keep a list of your license and card numbers so that if they are stolen, you can report them right away.
- Shred any personal documents you are throwing out.

FOR INFORMATION OR TO REPORT FRAUD:

- State attorney general's Web site: **www.ag.ca.gov**
- Department of Motor Vehicles: **www.dmv.ca.gov/consumer/fraud.htm** or fraud hot line (866) 658-5758.
- INS fraud investigations: (909) 386-3200.

SOURCES: CALIFORNIA ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE, SAN BERNARDINO IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

STOPPING FRAUD

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, the California Department of Motor Vehicles and local police have reported several Inland cases involving document fraud:

INS AND POLICE

- After a 1998 raid on a counterfeit document ring at the Azteca Swap Meet in San Bernardino, five people were arrested and sentenced to probation or 1 to 5 years in jail.
- A Mexican immigrant recently had worked at a Riverside optometrist's office using the Social Security number of a man in Mission Viejo, according to Riverside police.

The Mission Viejo man got a bill from the IRS saying he owed thousands in back taxes for the Riverside optometry job; the worker fled the country.

- A Chino man was arrested on Sept. 10, 2001, on charges he helped sell phony temporary work visas for white-collar workers in Northern California.

Ernesto Alfonso Llave, 42, pleaded guilty last month to mail fraud and obtaining false documents, according to the Los Angeles U.S. Attorney's office. Prosecutors are recommending Llave be sentenced to 10 to 16 months.

- Five people were arrested in an investigation last year but the INS declined to give details while their prosecution is pending.

DMV

- In August 1997, four people were arrested for allegedly offering a $2,000 bribe to get two driver licenses from a Palm Springs DMV license examiner working with investigators to set up a sting.
- In December 1997, a DMV worker from Menifee was among four people indicted for allegedly charging undocumented immigrants hundreds of dollars to get licenses at DMV offices in Norco and Costa Mesa.
- Also in 1997, a bribery investigation called "Operation Clean Sweep" led to the firing of 24 DMV clerks statewide, including three in Riverside County.

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

Changes aim to drive down fraud

PREVENTION: California's DMV is making it harder to counterfeit or falsely acquire a license.

BY SHARYN OBIATZ, DIANA CERVANTES AND JORGE ARIZMENDI-PERALDOA
THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE/ LA PRENSA

Over the past year, California has tried to make its driver licenses harder to duplicate or acquire under false pretenses.

"Every time we make a change, the bad guys make a change and try to adapt," California's DMV director Steven Gourley said.

Since the Sept. 11 attacks, Gourley said, officials from Virginia, Florida and other states where hijackers obtained licenses have asked for tips from California about how to close the security loopholes.

Changes California has made over the past two years include:

- Verifying Social Security numbers with the Social Security Administration for all new license applications and renewals.
- Requiring two employees to compare applicants' faces with past license photos archived in the DMV computer system.
- Adding holograms, tiny printing and a magnetic data strip to make licenses harder to duplicate.

Now the DMV is lobbying for $8 million to start checking applicants' fingerprints through a computerized database.

The DMV launched 449 ID theft investigations between April 1 and Nov. 30 last year based on calls to its fraud hot line. The DMV estimates more than 100 of the overseen state-

changed their hair color or had plastic surgery. Haskins said that over 13 months, 4,450 investigations have been launched because photos didn't match.

Authorities also worry about uninsured drivers who lack licenses or carry false licenses and phony insurance cards.

Teri Foreman of Riverside has undergone three spinal surgeries since being hit by an 18-year-old uninsured driver who ran a red light three years ago. She does not know if the driver was an illegal immigrant.

"I'll never be the same," said Foreman, 38, now disabled. She lost her job of 13 years at a Nordstrom distribution center in Ontario.

Foreman said, "I ended up with nothing but three years in pain."

Some immigrants say their obligations require them to drive without a proper license.

Ontario resident Marisol Martinez, an undocumented immigrant from Mexico City, said she drives daily without a license to take her two children to school and to attend rehabilitative therapy after being disabled in a factory accident last summer.

She said she has lived in the United States for 11 years and obtained an official state ID card using a false Social Security number. But the ID card expired in October 2000, and new DMV regulations bar her from renewing it without a valid Social Security number.

Martinez, 28, said she hopes the governor will sign a state bill passed last year that would allow driver licenses for as many as 1 million of the estimated 2 million illegal immigrant drivers in California. The

DOCUMENTS

CONTINUED FROM A4

When the man failed to show up for court, a warrant was issued for Hermosillo's arrest. Court documents show Hermosillo has since been cleared.

"It screws people's lives up forever," Ray Carstan said about identity theft.

Larry Brown, a Riverside illegal immigration opponent, said police should do more to enforce laws against document fraud.

"Good people don't break into the country," said Brown, a member of the California Coalition for Immigration Reform. "Long before 9-11, I was saying it was dangerous. Since 9-11, I think the average Joe Six-pack can say that it's a national security threat that we have so many people here illegally."

Illegal immigration opponents also question whether undocumented immigrants are using false identification to get welfare benefits.

Both San Bernardino and Riverside counties say they ask for identification for many social service programs and haven't noticed any ID fraud problems.

In June 2000, Riverside County started verifying welfare applicants' identities by checking their fingerprints in a statewide system — a requirement for CalWORKs, food stamps and medical assistance, said Kevin Gaines, the county's social services department spokesman.

San Bernardino County spokesman David Wert said its social services department doesn't verify the immigration status of clients.

"This isn't a county problem. This concerns the INS," Wert said.

Solutions

Riverside Police Detective Dan Flores said document fraud can be thwarted by store clerks, bank tellers and others who take police-sponsored classes about detecting false documents.

"Most of the time, (the forgeries) don't even look legitimate," Flores said, citing cards with misspelled cities, crooked writing or pictures that have been laminated over and over. "Most of the time, people have an intuition that something's up, and most of the time they're right."

The INS also sets up training programs with the DMV, social services and companies that need to be able to tell whether immigration documents are real. Jones said workshop participants get tips for checking whether lines on documents are clean and straight, whether the eagle on INS green cards looks like an eagle or more like a pigeon.

State Sen. Neil Soto, D-Ontario, said the demand for false documents could be reduced by granting more temporary work visas to migrants who provide "a needed labor pool."

"The people that are providing false documents should be sought out and punished," Soto said, while advocating an expanded guestworker visa program for people "looking for honest, everyday work."

She said the expanded program, currently under debate in Congress, could also track immigrant workers, "so people aren't running in and out of our country without scrutiny."

Congressman Ken Calvert, R-Corona, said the INS and the U.S. Border Patrol must be beefed up to tackle document fraud driven by illegal immigration. Calvert said the agencies need more personnel, better computer technology and better communication with the FBI, Social Security Administration, and other authorities.

Calvert agrees with Soto that a carefully monitored guestworker program would reduce fraud while keeping better tabs on workers and their employers.

Reach Press-Enterprise reporter Sharyn Obiatz at (909) 782-6238 or sobiatz@pe.com and La Prensa reporters Diana Cervantes at (909) 248-1832 or dianamos@pe.com and Jorge Arizmendi-Peraldoa at (909) 248-1825 or jarizmendi@pe.com.

LIVING

ENTERTAINMENT SECTION C-5
INSIDE

WEDDINGS ENGAGEMENTS ANNIVERSARIES

He's no fish but finds peace in the water

Once or twice a week, I slip into the community pool for a lunchtime swim of 40 or so lengths.

A colleague coerced me into the pool. In years past, pools and I haven't mixed much, but he made swimming sound so rewarding, I shook off misgivings and made the plunge. And he was right. Now I look forward to it.

In the water, I wear a pair of Speedo goggles, but I'm about 50 pounds over the manage limit for Speedo swim trunks.

I'm an old plow horse in baggy trunks leaderboarding my way across the concrete pool apron. I lower myself into the water and push off the wall. For the first lap, I warm up with a breast stroke, frog-kicking the length of the pool, then switching to freestyle for the return leg. I freestyle the remaining 38 lengths, and finish a with five or so breast stroke laps as a warm down.

GORDON JOHNSON

I'm a slow, ugly swimmer, relying on short, choppy strokes to propel me. When I was a kid, I admired Johnny Weissmuller's powerful Tarzan stroke so he glided through jungle lagoons. I especially liked the way he poured it on when a crocodile threatened to gnaw on Jane. I've always tried to emulate his style. But I just don't have it.

I swim as a form of relaxation, as a meditation to sync mind and body.

I allow my thoughts free rein as the water beckons in blue ahead of me. I follow the lane stripe of dark blue mosaic tile beneath me. I turn my head to inhale and see blue and white flags above the pool ripple

Courtesy of Connie McFarland

This photo, believed to date back to the World War I era, shows an all-Mexican brass band that played at the Wyatt Opera House in north Redlands on Sundays. Epimenio Guzman, one of Redlands' first blacksmiths, is seated in the first row of chairs, the second man on the left, holding a saxophone on his lap.

Bridge in time

chopping at my stroke so I never lose a rhythm and stay with it. In the lane next to me, one of those sleek-bodied swimmers in Speedos blasts three laps to my one. He wears a monitor on a chest strap that counts and times his strokes per lap. I catch underwater glimpses of him as he leaves me in his wake.

In the other lane, an older gentleman wears fins and hand paddles to strengthen his swim muscles. Maybe he's two decades older than I am, but he powers through the water, also leaving me in his wake.

I fight the old, competitive urges to speed up. I tell myself, swim for the pure sense of it. Don't worry about speed. Don't worry about conditioning. Don't worry. Just swim. Just turn your head to breathe. Just pull your arms through the water. Just kick your legs with muscles self-composed.

I focus on flow. On the fluidity and buoyancy of my body suspended in liquid. I set my mind adrift, lulled into meanderings.

I pass through the deep end, the 12-foot end, and I remember in my early youth my incredulity at people who swam in water over their heads.

"Doesn't matter how deep it is, son," my father told me when I was about 5. "If you can swim in shallow water, you can swim in deep water."

He failed to emphasize the "can swim" part, so in short order I climbed a diving board and jumped into the deep end. My short life passed before my eyes as lifeguards fished me out of the water.

Maybe the trauma of near drowning kept me from being totally at ease in the water. So in high school, I didn't go out for the swim team or water polo or diving.

But at this stage in my life, I luxuriate in the swim. The slow, melodic locomotion through liquid offers metaphysical solace. The turn of the head to inhale. The rumbling exhale of underwater bubbles consoles me. The sounds of swimming muffled to me. The water streaming past my ears. The splash of my hand knifing through the water. The churning from the kicks. The absence of near weightlessness, of body suspended.

From our earliest moments we swim in embryonic fluids. I seem to remember high school teachers describe vestiges of gills in our embryonic development. I don't know if that's true, but we might have been water people in our primordial past. The tug of water remains strong.

In the pool, the real world disappears, and I'm immersed in liquefied apparitions. I have no bills, no deadlines, no responsibilities, just the fluid moment.

Maybe I am an ugly swimmer, but inside, I'm at peace.

Gordon Johnson/Editorials appears Thursdays. To reach him, call (909) 387-3119, fax (909) 876-9232, e-mail him at gjohnson@pe.com or write to The Press-Enterprise, 3750 Jefferson Ave. Suite 360, Riverside, CA 92501.

For six years a historian has been collecting stories of workers who helped make a citrus empire.

By Sharyn Obsatz
The Press-Enterprise

REDLANDS

Sam Coyazo admired the yellowed photograph of his grandfather, Andres Morales, a solemn-looking man with a handlebar mustache. Morales was the patriarch of a Mexican family that settled in San Bernardino's East Valley — the towns of Redlands, Yucaipa, Highland, Loma Linda, Bryn Mawr and Mentone — and tended the citrus groves that built that area's economy.

"He looks like Wyatt Earp," said Coyazo, a 67-year-old machinist and former citrus laborer, paging through a scrapbook earlier this month.

Earp was fame and a place in the history books. Morales did not.

Until now.

Local historian Robert Gonzales hopes to preserve the life stories of the Morales/Coyazo family, and many others, through the Redlands Oral History Project's "Visions and Versions: Living Lives in the East Valley."

The project will hold exhibitions, walking tours, film presentations and forums throughout the Inland Empire over the next two months beginning Saturday. Borough

Please see HISTORY, C-4

Charlene K. Engeron/The Press-Enterprise

Robert Gonzales, curator of the Redlands Oral History Project, stands on the foundation of what was once a restroom facility for Mexican nationals who worked as braceros in San Bernardino County.

Rafael Gonzalez, circa 1942, was one of the thousands of Mexican nationals who came to the United States to work on farms during the labor shortage caused by World War II.

ORAL HISTORIES

Mexican immigrants recall valley life

By Sharyn Obsatz
The Press-Enterprise

REDLANDS

Descendants of early Mexican immigrants to the East Valley shared their memories of daily life over the century during interviews for the Redlands Oral History Project's "Visions and Versions: Living Lives in the East Valley."

Here are a few of their recollections, including excerpts quoted from their interviews:

On work

■ Prudence Gonzales of Redlands, who died in her 90s a few years ago, was one of several people interviewed who had started work young, dropping out of school at age 11. She helped her family by chopping wood, driving a horse and wagon to gather wood in Moreno Valley and following her uncle to the citrus groves.

"I loved to go with my uncle to the groves . . . I used to drive the team of horses, and he used to shovel out the manure right and left . . . In those days, they used nothing but manure."

Gonzales remembered how her husband, a citrus laborer, refused to quit working until the day he broke his

Please see MEMORIES, C-4

Courtesy of Rita Rudolff and Leland H. Richardson

This photo, taken in 1906, shows Quintin Velarde, Mercedes Federico Velarde and their daughter Tomasita. The family built their home in 1892 in Redlands near Prospect Park. Quintin worked in the orange groves. Mercedes was a domestic at the Sterling mansion.

BRACERO CAMP

Remembering living at Cone Camp

By Charlene K. Engeron
The Press-Enterprise

About eight miles north of Interstate 10 in the wilds just east of Redlands, the remnants of an old labor camp whisper the memories of Mexican workers no longer there.

These workers, known as braceros, lived in labor camps by night and were trucked out of the camps to farms and crops during the day.

In San Bernardino County, one of the best-known bracero housing locales was called Cone Camp. It was located in the Santa Ana River bed, near Highland, approximately two miles southeast of Greenspot and Cone Camp roads. As many as 1,500 men called Cone Camp home each winter as they picked crops ranging from citrus in Redlands to grapes in the Rancho Cucamonga vineyards.

Articles from agriculture magazines, reports from the California Labor Department and other documentation give a positive view of the program, but men who lived and worked in the bracero program give a much different opinion.

Yucaipa resident Andres Garcia came to Cone Camp

Please see CONE, C-4

History

Continued from C-1

June 17. Project organizers also plan to compile photographs and interviews for a coffee-table book.

Gonzales, 25, said he wants to share and celebrate what he views as the often overlooked contributions that Mexican immigrants made to developing the valley.

Coyazo, one of five Mendez descendants who worked in the local groves, hauled about 100,000 oranges and grapefruits a day to the packing houses, six days a week, for nearly 10 years. His father's side of the family includes several more citrus pickers and contractors.

"Their family was responsible for bringing millions and millions of dollars into the local economy," Gonzales said. "More oranges were shipped out of Southern California than gold shipped out of the (California) mother lode."

Gonzales, born in San Bernardino and raised in Redlands, is a former teacher with a master's degree in history from the University of California, Riverside. He was asked in the early 1990s to help the A.K. Smiley Public Library in Redlands conduct interviews with citrus growers and laborers.

While he found plenty of archives about the town's wealthy founders, Gonzales said, there was no documentation of the people who worked the groves, of the Mexican families who had lived here for generations.

"For a town that takes such pride in its history and tradition, it was embarrassing to see we had been completely cut out of this town's history," he said. "We are a community. As a community, we have to be proud of all of the community, not just the ones who endowed buildings and made a lot of money. We are part of the story, and our story is important."

Coyazo, whose 89-year-old uncle Blas Coyazo was interviewed for the project, recalls growing up in the 1940s and 1950s in Redlands, back when the scent of orange blossoms overwhelmed the air, when smoke blanketed the morning skies during smudge season. He struggles to remember the family tales told by his late uncle Jose Mendez, revered for his great memory.

"Now I think back and say, why didn't I get a tape recorder," Coyazo said. "I know what he told me, but I wasn't paying attention."

But Gonzales did get a tape recorder, determined to document these oral histories before they were stolen by death or forgotten. He spent six years interviewing East Valley residents of Mexican ancestry.

Since beginning the project, eight of the 24 people he interviewed have died, he said. The history of Mexican immigrants to the area before 1910 already has been lost.

Gonzales has rustled up some funding. The A.K. Smiley Public Library provided office space, support and supplies. Other sponsors are the Redlands Area Historical Society and The Press-Enterprise.

The California Council for the Humanities gave the project a $10,000 grant.

"We thought it fit our mission," said Jon Quay, executive director of the California Council for the Humanities, which has its headquarters in San Francisco. He said the East Valley project uncovers hidden histories and makes them accessible to the public in innovative ways.

"The more we know about our neighbors and our histories, the more we understand each other," Quay said. Understanding leads to relate to the immigrant experience, he said. "More than half of the people living in California were born somewhere else."

Gonzales said he hopes the project will be a bridge between the different sectors of the East Valley by showing what everyone has in common.

"For people of Mexican descent," he said, "our basic ambitions, our goals are centered around making sure our families are taken care of. That's true of anybody."

Gonzales also intends to debunk some misconceptions about early Mexican immigrants, including the myth that they were illiterate, that they only worked in the citrus groves and that immigrant women always stayed at home.

Rita Radeleff, 76, a retired bank administrator who lives in San Bernardino, said family history is a source of pride.

Her grandfather, Epimenio Guzman, was one of the first blacksmiths in Redlands. Her grandmother, Mercedes Federica Guzman, was a domestic employee at the Sterling family mansion. She keeps a computer file on the accomplishments of each generation.

"As you get older, you live more in the past than you did when you were younger," Radeleff said.

panic was not good. It was decreasing back in the '20s, '30s and '40s."

She has supplied some photographs for the project, and her family will be included in the project's 10-city California tour next year.

Radeleff spends hours researching her family's background in the county archives and organizing boxes of memories. She stays up nights thinking about her Redlands ancestors, including her uncle, a lumberjack who she recalls was forever struggling to rein in his mule-drawn wagon on the way down the mountains after cutting trees for the building trade.

"The thing that really held the town together — and the surrounding area — was the workers and the small businessmen," Radeleff said. The cooks, builders, restaurant owners, maids, citrus laborers and auto mechanics, she said, "they were the glue that held Redlands together. You had the pillars there, but you needed the substance to hold it together."

Anyone wanting to help with this ongoing research may call the Redlands Oral History Project at (909) 307-9370.

Sharyn Obeatz can be reached at sobeatz@pe.com or (909) 793-

Courtesy of the Redlands Oral History Project

This photo, believed to have been shot in the late 1920s, shows the local Mexican Boys Marching Band and Drum Corps heading down Colton Avenue in Redlands. The band performed throughout California.

CONE

Continued from C-1

to 1961. Garcia recently granted an interview with Robert Gonzales, curator of the Redlands Oral History Project. The project aims to gather interviews, photos and other documents that will help record the history and lives of people of Mexican decent living in the San Bernardino valley.

In transcripts from the interview, Garcia said, "It was terrible for us, you know, because we didn't have no transportation into the town. We don't got nothing . . . they were taking the money away from us."

Garcia said that the Mexican Consulate was of no help and ignored complaints of poor working conditions and bad food.

"We eat beans and chile because we can't afford something better. When we have some money we eat some meat too," Garcia said. " . . . And naturally, we protest and called the consul to come and look, and the consul say, 'Oh, no, no, no. It's good food that they serve.' "

By the time the bracero program ended in 1964, more than 5 million Mexican nationals had crossed the border to work in the United States. Not all of them returned home. Garcia is one of many men who stayed in the United States, planted roots and started families.

Today, evidence of Cone Camp remains. For starters, the road leading into the camp is still marked as Cone Camp Road. It was most recently used as a hauling road during construction of Seven Oaks Dam.

A short portion of the road leads to a handful of private residences, but ends at a wide metal gate flanked by several large boulders. The gate blocks automobile access to the site. However, a long walk into the Santa Ana River bed will lead visitors to an area surrounded by large pepper trees and cactus which look out of place compared to the rest of the terrain.

Square, concrete pillars still stand at what was the entrance to the camp. The structures are long gone, but concrete slab foundations remain. Some are covered with broken bits of clay tiles that once covered the floors. What little wood there is left attached to the foundations is charred, as if a fire wiped out the complex.

Gonzales, who has researched the history of the camp for the Redlands Oral History Project, believes the larger slabs once held the administration building, a commissary or possibly a large barracks. Farther back past the entrance, smaller pads are believed to have been living quarters for the Mexican nationals who lived there.

The bathing and restroom facilities were located on one edge of the camp and are still identifiable by the 24 holes that were clearly where toilets were bolted to the floor.

Gonzales has a personal interest in the history of Cone Camp. His father was a bracero.

> *"This was the first place in California my father came to. I just felt somehow connected to this place."*
>
> **Robert Gonzales, curator of the Redlands Oral History Project**

"It was a very powerful feeling to come out here," Gonzales said. "This was the first place in California my father came to. I just felt somehow connected to this place."

Gonzales said his father told him stories of exploitation in the system. Wages withheld from workers that were supposed to be sent home at the end of their contracts never made it there, said Gonzales. He also noted it was a very difficult life because the braceros were in a desolate area, several thousand miles away from home, away from their families. The workers also received ridicule from local workers who thought the braceros were taking away jobs and slashing the prevailing wage.

Gonzales said it has been difficult getting interviews from men who lived and worked as braceros because most are reluctant to relive those memories.

"I tried to interview a half dozen braceros, but only got an interview from one of them," he said.

Anyone interested in sharing their stories, photographs or other documentation about living a bracero may call (909) 307-9370.

Charlene Duncan can be reached at cduncan@pe.com or (909) 793-7457.

MEMORIES: Descendants share past

Continued from C-1

collarbone.

"He said he wouldn't quit working, that they would find him under a tree, dead. I used to tell him he was full of worms . . . Well, he always worked until he fell off the roof. He was up there trying to fix the roof, tin roof, the garage, and he got dizzy and he went through the hole where he was going to fix . . . It was a terrible, terrible time."

● Blas Coyazo, 89, retired and living in Redlands, was among the thousands of citrus pickers, irrigators and smudge workers. On a slow day, he picked 50 boxes of oranges, earning him $3, which was considered good pay, equal to the amount ditch diggers earned working for the gas utility company.

"As soon as there were nothing to do here in Redlands for this orange industry that's seasonal . . . we would go to Fresno . . . There's a lot of small towns there that they would need people to pick their grapes, pick their figs and plums, and all kinds of fruit all the months of August and September. And we would see a lot of people from around here — Colton, San Bernardino and so forth.

"And after we got through with all our fruits, why around September, we'd come to Corcoran and pick cotton for another couple months.

". . . I never can remember the Fourth of July where I used to go to the beach, never did. I was always in the grove irrigating. Labor Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, even Easter sometimes when we started irrigating."

● Simona Castillo, 81, a retired nurse from East Highlands, recalled her 50 years on the job.

"We had hard times. Say people come in all messed up and everything, we had to help. And I never raised my nose or my face to say, 'No, I can't) do it.' . . . I worked for Doctor Savage Sr. . . . Dr. Savage died holding onto my hand. He wanted me to be there when he died. He had cancer of the bone. And I was there with him."

On discrimination

Blas Coyazo is among the project participants who recalled growing up at a time when local businesses, such as Redlands' Majestic Theater, weren't friendly to minorities.

". . . This was 1917 or '18 when I first went to the show and I had just barely sat down when the usher came over and told me, 'You can't sit here. You have to sit against that section by the wall.'

"So I thought maybe the people that can sit there — where I was — would have to pay more. So I went and sat against the section by the wall. And from there on, every time I went to the show, that was our section, for the colored people and the Spanish-speaking people. (But) the center was the best viewing anytime."

"We had a skating rink in Redlands, and on Wednesday there was not too much business there . . . They made (Wednesday) a Spanish Night. And that place was packed with Spanish, Mexican girls and boys. We were all human, we wanted to skate."

There was also a pool called "The Plunge" at Sylvan Park.

". . . That was a nice place to go swimming but we couldn't go in, just on Mondays. And that was the day . . . we were closed out about 3:30 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon because they were going to close out the pool, and they did every Monday afternoon. And we went back on Tuesdays, we couldn't get in. The water was just beautiful every day from Tuesday on."

Many cafes and barber shops displayed "white trade" signs, refusing to serve minorities, Coyazo recalled. The Mexicans took their business elsewhere.

". . . These Japanese people used to run a pool hall and they were barbers. No problem there, they would cut our hair."

On social life

Blas Coyazo also talked about afternoon gatherings, called tardeadas.

"Local families from Bryn Mawr, Redlands, Mentone, they'd come over on Sundays. We didn't have nothing to, no big eats or anything, but we had ice tea or whatever we had. And we had a nice time, nobody fighting or nothing like that."

Churches, women's auxiliary groups, American Legion chapters and charities were the main social hubs in towns throughout the East Valley.

Graciano Gomez, 75, of Rialto, publisher of the Inland Empire Hispanic News, recalled living in Redlands and attending St. Mary's Catholic Church fund-raisers, called tardeadas.

". . . Usually they'll have a festivity and they'd have a lot of different booths. They'd sell either food, or games, or prizes, you know that kind of thing. Of course they had music, they'd have a dance and what have you. And sometimes it'd last two days, sometimes one day, usually on Sunday."

On military service

Most of the men interviewed had volunteered or been drafted into the U.S. military during World War II or the Korean War. Blas Coyazo worked as a military policeman in Germany, just after WWII. He noted that blacks were segregated into separate units but recalled little discrimination against him personally.

"Where I was, I was always one of the boys, you might say. I always will say that . . . you can tell right away when people, they don't want you around . . . They used to call me Coyote. When they couldn't pronounce my name Coyazo, they would call me Coyote. . . . Now the black troops, why, I can't say anything about them because we weren't ever in contact with them. They had their own PX and they had their own district where they would stay."

Why families immigrated

● Graciano Gomez said his maternal ancestors left Mexico in 1916 to avoid the revolution.

"My grandmother felt that . . . if they won, either the Federalists or the rebels coming to town in Agua Caliente, they would pick up the boys to get them into the service . . . And the girls would probably be raped, or you know, and they would take them and just adopt them, kidnap them, take them off."

Ella parents met in Los Angeles and later moved to Redlands because his mother had asthma and needed a better climate.

● Blas Coyazo said his parents paid dues to the government to cross from Juarez, Mexico, into the United States in 1916.

"My parents came from Mexico, from the state of Zacatecas. It's a mining city and my dad used to work there when he was a young man, that would be around the turn of the century. So, things were getting tough for them, and they wanted to come to the United States to better themselves."

On generosity

Those interviewed spoke of close-communities, such as Redlands' Northside or East Highlands, where people all knew each other and shared what they had.

Simona Castillo said her parents shared their garden vegetables, fruit, milk, livestock and telephone with neighbors during the Great Depression. Castillo's mother always said, "We were poor in Mexico, and we didn't have what we have now, so let them have it."

On change

Many of those interviewed missed the businesses or orange groves where they worked. Much of that past has disappeared. Blas Coyazo recalled the grapefruit groves on California Street.

"I went back there the other day and they chopped down the trees, the grove is all gone now. I mean just the trunks are standing up. It's such a sad thing to see."

Sharyn Obeid can be reached at sobeid@pe.com or (909) 793-4547.

Courtesy of the Redlands Oral History Project

Concepcion Romero, in her family's orange grove in the mid-1960s, ran restaurants in the East Valley, including one that now is the Thai House Restaurant on Redlands Boulevard.

Mexican braceros filled wartime need for labor

By Charlene S. Engeron
The Press-Enterprise

The bracero program started in 1942 when many local workers who had previously made their living working on America's farms and crops left to join the service or work in wartime industries. To fill this void in manpower, the United States entered into an agreement with Mexico to import workers over the border.

The workers were deployed all over the United States — including San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

Braceros signed contracts with employers, usually large farm owners, to spend between six weeks and six months in the United States. Extensions could be granted.

A 1959 report from the State of California Department of Employment points the bracero program as a well-organized solution to America's World War II labor problem. According to the report, upon entering the program, workers were given extensive physical examinations, vaccinations and all of their belongings were fumigated.

Once a Mexican national agreed to work for a farmer, the worker was entitled to free housing, bathing facilities, insurance, meals and transportation to and from job sites.

'Living Lives' oral history events

"Visions and Versions: Living Lives in the East Valley" runs April 29 to June 17 at the A.K. Smiley Public Library, 125 W. Vine St., in Redlands, (909) 798-7565.

The exhibition also runs May 1 to June 3 at partner locations. All sites are scheduled to be open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Contact individual locations for extended hours:

● San Bernardino Central Library, 555 W. Sixth St., San Bernardino, (909) 381-8215.

● Redlands Community Center, 111 W. Lugonia Ave., Redlands, (909) 798-7572.

● Crafton Hills College, 11711 Sand Canyon Road, Yucaipa, (909) 794-2161.

● Grove High School, 200 Nevada St., Redlands, (909) 798-7831.

● Clement Middle School, 501 E. Pennsylvania Ave., Redlands, (909) 307-5400.

● Redlands Mall, 100 Redlands Mall, Redlands, (909) 793-0333.

The oral history project also includes several public events, which are free unless otherwise noted:

● Today, 4:15 p.m. — "Visions and Versions: Building a History," Claremont Graduate University, 710 N. College Ave., in Claremont.

● Saturday, 2 p.m. — Opening reception and presentation followed by a showing of the film "The Trail North" at 3 p.m., A.K. Smiley Public Library, 125 W. Vine St., Redlands.

● Wednesday, 5:45 p.m. — Historical tour, "The Other Redlands: Visions of Community Past," reservations required, (909) 307-9370.

● Wednesday, 6 p.m. — "Chicano Park" film presentation and forum on "Revitalizing Community Culture" at A.K. Smiley Public Library, 125 W. Vine St., Redlands.

● May 5, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. — Cinco de Mayo open house, host is Friends of Smiley Library at A.K. Smiley Public Library, 125 W. Vine St., in Redlands.

● May 9, 2 p.m. and 7 p.m. — Presentation of "Redlands: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" at Grove High School, 200 Nevada St., in Redlands.

● May 20, 10 a.m.-2 p.m. — "Exploring Your History" conference at Grove High School, 200 Nevada St., in Redlands. A sliding-scale conference fee will be charged.

● May 26, 9:50 a.m. — "Visions for Your Time" presentation, Clement Middle School, 501 E. Pennsylvania Ave., in Redlands.

For program, sponsorship or other information, call the Redlands Oral History Project at (909) 307-9370.

ABANDONED, BUT NOT BEYOND HOPE

Associated Press / Julie Grober

Christina holds a book as she sits with her adopted mother, Evone, in their home near Santa Fe. The baby, who was put in a Dumpster by her birth mother three years ago, is thriving today.

Trashed baby a treasured child

By Sharyn Obsatz
The New Mexican

On a windy March night almost three years ago, Kareen Reyer was leaving her apartment in southwest Santa Fe to attend a concert when she heard a rustling sound from a Dumpster in the parking lot.

Inside the trash bin, she found a newborn girl, cold and blue, but alive. The baby was wrapped in a trash bag, soaked in embryonic fluid, her umbilical cord intact and untied.

"It was raining and sleeting a little bit," Reyer recalls. "I heard plastic rubbing together. I think God wanted me to know that was a baby."

She pressed the baby to her chest to warm her, and the newborn sucked at her ribs, trying to nurse. Reyer, her boyfriend and the apartment managers called for an ambulance to rush the baby to St. Vincent Hospital.

Nurses named the infant Baby Esperanza — Baby Hope.

Today that little girl is named Christina. On a recent afternoon, she was running circles around her adoptive family's living room east of Santa Fe, somersaulting along with gymnasts on TV and hoisting herself up on the kitchen sink to play with the water.

Nowadays, she pesters her four older brothers to pick her up and lobbies her adoptive mother for milk and cookies. She helps with the laundry and the dishes. She changes the dresses on her doll, Sally, several times a day.

The story of Baby Esperanza's discovery horrified many across the state.

She received cards, gifts and good wishes from hundreds of New Mexicans. St. Vincent Hospital nurses visited her when she was recovering from surgery for a cleft lip. Firefighters and police officers who helped rescue her sometimes check with her family.

"I never had an opportunity to thank everybody for all the gifts and cards that

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Monday, February 10, 1997

Baby found in trash now treasured child

HOPE from Page 1B

came," her 36-year-old adoptive mother, Evone, said. "Sometimes you think the world is so terrible. When something like this happens, you realize there's a lot of love, a lot of hope for humanity."

Christina's adoptive parents, cousins of the woman who gave birth to her and left her, asked that their last names not be used.

The woman who found Christina celebrates the child's birthday every year but hasn't seen her since, worried she'll be an unpleasant reminder to the girl of what happened.

Reyer said she held the baby that night for about 10 minutes until police arrived. Her own daughters, ages 9 and 10, were watching. They visited the baby in the hospital.

Reyer said she tried to adopt the baby, and one of her daughters "went through a phase where she really hated me because I wouldn't go get the baby out of the hospital."

She and her daughters still talk about the baby, wondering how tall she is, how many teeth she has, what her favorite toy is.

Every March 25, Reyer said, "We make a little cake and we say prayers for that day. We sing 'Happy Birthday.' It was a life-changing experience. You don't take being a mom for granted."

Christina's adoptive mother says the little girl is the daughter she and her husband, Fernando, wanted for so many years.

Evone remembers reading a newspaper article about a baby being found in a Dumpster and police searching for its mother.

She said she was devastated, couldn't sleep or eat, and told her husband they should adopt the baby.

Then police arrested Rosalie Prada, 29, and Evone realized she was related to the baby.

The family contacted the state children, youth and families department, took the baby home from the hospital as foster parents and adopted her a year later.

Prada has visited her a few times.

In court she apologized for leaving her baby in the trash bin, and said she thought the baby was dead. Prada was sentenced to eight months in the Santa Fe County jail, three years of probation and is undergoing counseling.

Her defense attorney said Prada needed psychological treatment and had an IQ of only 78 or 79.

"None of us like what she did," Evone said. "I'm not here to judge what she did. I'll leave that up to God."

Jason Rinski/The New Mexican

"You don't have to worry about all your little friends. You just have to worry about your car."

CHRISTINA GARCIA
Lowrider

Lady Lowri

'We can be ju

By SHARYN OBSATZ
The New Mexican

An orange, tinted-window Trans Am waits at a Santa Fe stoplight, flanked by another lowrider, engines revving, adrenaline pumping.

The light turns green and the Trans Am takes off, its Corvette engine roaring. It slows to let the other car catch up. The driver's-side window rolls down.

Christina Garcia, with makeup and a hairdo out to there, peeks out, laughing as her male lowrider challenger does a double-take and "freaks."

It's one of thrills of driving, and owning, a custom car, said Garcia, 19, who will show off her car Sunday at the Peace in the Streets Lowrider Custom Car and Bike Show II. The show is a fund-raiser for The Rainbow Project, a local gang prevention and intervention program.

Driving cars customized and altered to ride low to the ground — often characterized as a macho endeavor — is becoming more popular with women, Garcia said.

"The guys think they're better at everything," Garcia said. "We can be just as good."

Indeed, as Chimayó lowrider legend Victor Martinez explained, women have always called the shots in much of the design and decoration of their husbands' and boyfriends' cars.

Martinez said he even recalls a all-female car club in Albuquerque in the 1980s.

"I give them credit," he said, adding that he feels his 1979 Cadillac, airbrushed with a picture of the Santuario de Chimayó, belongs to his

der

'st as good'

family, not just to him.

He disputes the theory that the lowrider tradition came from California to New Mexico in the 1960s with a rising Hispanic pride movement. He said many people have told him Northern New Mexicans who went to California for jobs in the 1930s and 1940s started the trend and continued it when they returned home.

For Garcia, it was her older sister's boyfriend who got both her and her sister hooked on the lowriding scene.

Then, about four years ago, her sister customized her own Blazer with a multi-colored paint job, velvet interior and gold rims and bumpers.

Garcia's boyfriend gave her the Trans Am eight months ago after it had been nearly totalled in an accident.

She paid $4,000 for body work, paint, detailing, chrome rims and a stereo system that was stolen during Fiesta weekend this year. She had earned the money working as a receptionist for the Center for Contemporary Arts, as a shoe store employee and as a cashier at her neighborhood grocery store.

"I've just been putting all my money into it. It keeps me out of trouble," Garcia said, explaining that she used to hang out "with the wrong crowd" but now doesn't have the time, money or inclination to drink or use drugs.

"You don't have to worry about all your little friends," she said. "You just have to worry about your car."

Her car club, Another Bad Creation, like many others, prohibits

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LOWRIDER

Continued from Page B-1

its members from drinking and using drugs.

She washes her car three times a week, cruises downtown nearly every evening, and drives the car along Albuquerque's cruise strip on the weekends.

"It feels neat," she said. "You have everybody looking at you. All the guys flirt with you."

She has already won prizes at a two car shows.

Garcia will be one of an estimated 40 lowrider car owners competing for trophies and prizes at Sunday's fund-raiser.

Manish Gaur, Rainbow Project Coordinator and organizer of the fundraiser, said the event also will feature about 20 customized bicycles, plus soft drinks for sale and concerts by Santa Fe rap band La Conecta and traditional New Mexico folk singer Antonia Apodoca.

Last year's event raised about $2,000 for the program, which hosted workshops, trained peer counselors, organized support groups and provided activities for Santa Fe youth.

The lowrider show will be from noon to 5 p.m. at the Center for Contemporary Arts Teen Warehouse, 1614 Paseo de Peralta, between St. Francis Drive and Guadalupe Street. Admission is $5 for adults, $1 for children age 12 and under, and $1 for adults involved in any youth program throughout the city.

For more information or to enter the competition, call Manish Gaur at 989-4423.

The New Mexican - Sept. 22, 1995

Fun, fast feature.