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[2006 Q4 FReepathon. Target: \\$70,000](#)

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83%

**Woo hoo!! Less than \$12k to go!! Thank you all very much!!**

## **New day labor site hopes to solve old problems By MARY SANCHEZ The Kansas City Star**

**Kansas City Star** | November 27, 2003 | Mary Sanchez

Posted on **11/28/2003 3:31:15 AM PST** by **Lobbyist**

New day labor site hopes to solve old problems By MARY SANCHEZ The Kansas City Star

As long as anyone can remember, the intersection at Southwest Boulevard and Summit Street has been a drive-through labor source.

Every morning, 20, 30, and in peak summer months, as many as 80 men gather, waiting to be hired for the day, the week, sometimes for only a few hours.

The men — mostly Mexican — bargain for work with people who cruise the area seeking cheap day laborers. Many work in Kansas City's suburbs — roofing, dry walling, pouring concrete, landscaping and hauling brush.

The well-known scene will change — or at least shift a few blocks east — under a plan being crafted by the Kansas City Police Department to oversee a day labor site at 2136 Jefferson St.

The Jefferson site — which will double as a new location for the existing nonprofit Community Action Network — mirrors similar efforts in cities such as Los Angeles, Chicago and Austin, Texas. In those cities, police, city and nonprofit monitored sites are controlling drinking and loitering among day laborers and stopping unscrupulous employers from exploiting the men.

“As long as the employers are coming down here, then people are going to be standing on the corner,” said Chad Gardner, a Kansas City police officer who, along with partner Matt Tomasic, is helping orchestrate the opening of the new labor location.

Tomasic and Gardner, who work out of the CAN center, plan a December opening.

Most of the men do not qualify for long-term legal entry into the United States, which usually requires a sponsor, such as employers or relatives who are citizens. Yet many have been in the country for years, sending wages home to family in Mexico and other Central American countries. Some are homeless. Some share apartments in the Northeast area.

Day laborers earn \$8 to \$10 an hour, the men said. Roofers with good skills can make \$15 an hour. The

officers brush off attitudes that question police aiding people illegally in the country.

“These guys are very much a part of the community,” Tomasic said. “Whether people want to admit it or not.” The labor site is the latest solution to an old problem for the West Side.

Because of some of the men's legal status, they draw the public's disdain for that issue, and they are open to exploitation by employers.

Employers know the men are less likely to complain about not being paid or being asked to do dangerous work because they fear deportation.

Numerous studies have found about 50 percent of day laborers have trouble getting paid. When asked about nonpayment, most of the men have stories.

“No money, no nothing,” one man said. Gardner and Tomasic have mediated such disputes as part of their duties patrolling the West Side and downtown areas.

“It's stealing,” Gardner said. “It's a crime.” The men also are crime targets because they often carry their wages in cash.

But the officers and other neighborhood leaders are just as unwilling to tolerate problems by the men.

“They can't be drinking on the boulevard or selling drugs,” said Lynda Callon, community coordinator of the Westside CAN Center, now at 2415 Summit St. “If they are, their choice is either go to jail or get deported.” The predominantly Mexican-American West Side has struggled and co-existed with the day laborers for years. Families have generations-old stories of feeding the men and counseling them as they travel to work in other states.

At other times, boulevard business owners have grown frustrated. Customers feared the men, and some of them harassed female patrons.

The mid-'90s saw a shelter open nearby. It closed when the number of men became more than donations could feed. Callon, Tomasic and Gardner — who speaks Spanish — hope their new plan will be a permanent solution.

“All of the pain, anger or sadness about this situation needs to be directed and focused on demanding Congress pass immigration laws that work,” Callon said. “If we have whole categories of our economy that are dependent on immigrant labor, then let's make it work.”

In the meantime, Callon said, the new labor site will deal with the reality of the men's presence.

A welcome change

Callon is credited with being the force behind the new center.

She makes the men pick up trash along the boulevard, paint over graffiti and do other odd jobs in exchange for food and clothing vouchers to be redeemed at a local thrift store and restaurant.

“If they are looking for a helping hand, we are happy to be that hand,” she said. “But they can't be a neighborhood nuisance.”

The new center will have 40 lockers for the men to keep clothes and identification such as birth certificates and work authorization cards.

Men awaiting work on a recent morning all knew about the new center and welcomed its opening.

One man, from the coastal Mexican city of Veracruz, arrived from Maine two weeks ago. The man agreed with others, saying a formal labor site and police presence will discourage bad employers and workers interested in drinking, not work.

Tomasic and Gardner plan to encourage employers to drive to the new location to find the workers, a more out-of-the-way spot under the Interstate 35 overpass.

Callon hopes the men will organize, warning each other of employers who don't pay or who put workers in danger. A September 2002 General Accounting Office report found day laborers are "vulnerable to various types of workplace dangers and abuses."

The GAO report was generated at the request of Rep. Luis Gutierrez, an Illinois Democrat.

Gutierrez introduced the Day Labor Fairness and Protection Act, which among other things, bans fees on cashing checks and ensures a minimum daily wage. The measure is not expected to pass this session.

Most fair labor standards apply to the men.

"The courts have pretty uniformly said you have the right to be paid for work done, regardless of legal status," said Rebecca Smith, coordinator of the Immigrant Workers Rights Project of the National Employment Law Project.

The Wage and Hour Division of the Department of Labor recently distributed fair wage handouts on the boulevard in English and Spanish.

But enforcement is difficult. Because most of the men are paid in cash, there is no paper trail.

Police and the men say it is a mistake to assume all day laborers are undocumented or living illegally in the United States.

Many of the workers have lived in the United States for more than a decade and speak English well.

About two to three times a year, immigration officials come to the boulevard to arrest people illegally in the country. About 20 men were arrested last week in a raid. But immigration officials focus their limited manpower on immigrants with criminal backgrounds and terrorists, said Mike Smith, interim resident agent in charge of Kansas City's Immigration and Customs Enforcement office. "I don't say we look the other way," Smith said. "We are looking right at it. But we have certain constraints of time and manpower."

'She's our mother'

By about 9:30 a.m. the men who haven't found work often visit Callon at the center. She offers a place to watch television, get a cup of hot coffee, use the bathroom. Callon queries one man, recently diagnosed with emphysema, on his struggle to quit smoking.

On another day, Callon guided a man to the hospital. Blisters erupted on his body after he was hired to clean a lot filled with poison ivy.

She has coordinated mental health attention through nearby Mattie Rhodes Counseling and Art Center.

Depression is a common problem because the men are separated from their families.

Callon speaks little Spanish, but is revered.

One worker recently returned to Mexico for the holiday season. Before he left, the man bought a disposable camera and snapped a portrait of Callon to show to his mother in Mexico.

"She's our mother," Johnatan Starr, who is half Dakota Sioux and half Mexican, said of Callon. Starr was born in Sioux City, Iowa but raised in Sinaloa, Mexico.

"It will be a good place," Starr said of the new office. "It will be like a base for us."

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1 posted on 11/28/2003 3:31:16 AM PST by **Lobbyist**  
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To: **Lobbyist**



2 posted on 11/28/2003 4:03:10 AM PST by **martin\_fierro** (\_\_\_\_0000\_(°\_ι\_°)\_0000\_\_\_\_)  
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To: **Lobbyist**

\$50.00 a day, and a mid-day meal.

Preferably with beer.

That's the going rate, for "good" workers, at least one being able to speak english.

3 posted on 11/28/2003 6:39:31 AM PST by **Drammach**  
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To: **martin\_fierro**

IMHO, YMMV, etc. ... Mexico is indeed closer than ever and the stench is getting unbearable.

4 posted on 11/28/2003 6:54:20 AM PST by **DumpsterDiver**  
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To: **gubamyster**; **HiJinx**

ping