



HAPpenings !

HISPANIC AFFAIRS PROJECT

HAP is dedicated to providing attention to the needs and social development of the Hispanic immigrant community via a focus on leadership formation, community organizing, and advocacy

Newsletter ~ March, 2013



Photo at left: 28 delegates represent Western Colorado during Latino Advocacy Days at the Capitol on February 17-18. Joining other immigrant rights advocacy groups, HAP spoke out to express our support of bills being proposed in the Senate and House. **Leaders promoted the ASSET bill (SB 33), which passed out of both the House and Senate on March 8!!!**

This bill will afford undocumented students access to in-state tuition, strengthening the economy without costing taxpayers a dime!

WORKING TO IMPROVE EDUCATION & THE ECONOMY IN COLORADO

As part of our march toward achieving federal immigration reform, HAP collaborates with other social justice groups from across Colorado to promote the passage of bills in the state legislature.

Our elected officials need to hear from constituents about the importance of integrating 11 million people in this country, many of whom are our friends, neighbors, colleagues, and fellow students. The Hispanic Affairs Committees in each town are currently organizing events and activities, and we need your support!



Above: Alain Bucio, Paloma Moreno & Luis Medrano of the Hispanic Affairs Committee of Grand Junction share the challenges of pursuing higher education at Colorado institutions.



At left: Antonio Vázquez talks with Senator Jessie Ulibarri (at far right) about other proposed legislation, including the Community and Law Enforcement Trust Act & The Income Protection Act.

LOCAL ACTIONS

Immigration attorney Imelda Mulholland leads informational sessions in Montrose & Grand Junction. Changes to USCIS processing will affect some immediate relatives of U.S. citizens (I-601 Waivers).



Representatives of HAP and the MCPLD Literacy Center visit the offices of public servants and elected officials to express concerns about resources available to support integration efforts for immigrant and refugee families in the region. Comprehensive immigration reform, if coupled with investments in human development, will provide a labor force capable of overcoming economic obstacles. With support for integration, immigrants will have much to offer our state's economic development.

By the time a student has completed 3 years in K-12 education, Colorado taxpayers have invested \$18,000 in that student's education. Opening the doors to higher education at an in-state rate for these students does not cost taxpayers any more money.



MIGRANT WORKERS

Rafael is a Peruvian with an H2A visa who has worked for many years in the sheep industry in Colorado. He and his companions faced serious consequences after Rafael appeared on television to speak about his partial vision loss from working in the snow without proper eyewear. His employer saw the interview and decided not to renew his contract; he also refused a Grand Junction doctor's offer to treat Rafael's eyes free of charge. There were four other Peruvians working on the same ranch at the time. They told their employer that if he did not renew Rafael's contract, they would no longer work for him. The rancher decided to renew Rafael's contract; shortly thereafter, Rafael suffered a work-related accident which resulted in the amputation of one of his fingers. The rancher then terminated the employment of Rafael and the other four workers without any reasonable explanation. For example, one of the workers was fired for sleeping at

6:30 a.m.; he was told that a shepherd is required 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Rafael has now lost the legal status afforded by the H2A visa. He is working to save up enough money to return to his country. H2A range worker visas link shepherders to their employers in a way that renders them completely vulnerable to their employers, thanks to obsolete labor regulations. **In other countries, such an arrangement would literally be considered human trafficking.**



WAGE THEFT

Hotchkiss, February 14, 5:30 p.m. Interview with a shepherd preparing a lawsuit for wage theft

“My boss was always hard on me, but I finally had enough when he sent me to the mountains without the basic necessities for survival. I spent an entire week without food, water or propane gas. I had to find another shepherd to ask for food and water, and to borrow his cell phone to call my boss; I called him twice to tell him that I was tired of his mistreatment and that he needed to pick up his sheep because I was quitting. When my boss arrived, he took me and his sheep to another place without acknowledging my request. I told him, once again, that I had been working for him for 10 months and that nothing had changed. He said that if I quit, he would not pay me my monthly salary. I told him to send someone else the next day to take care of his sheep because I was going to leave. A friend came and picked me up and helped me find another job. A few days later, I called him to ask for the money he owed me. He that his son owned that ranch and that I should speak with him; when I spoke

with the son, he said that his father owned the ranch. The debt is \$500 for 25 days of work. I have a wife and a daughter and I am only asking for what is rightfully mine. This money represents nearly a month of work for me...Recently, I met a kind man and I told him what had happened with my former employer. The man felt so badly that he gave me \$100. This is the truth.”

The HAP team has shared valuable information regarding the rights of workers with many shepherders when visiting their campsites. Nevertheless, workers are often too frightened to file formal complaints. An attorney is assisting this man *pro bono* to recover the money owed him.

HAP supports Interfaith Worker Justice-Colorado, including the proposed Income Protection Act (HB13-1227), which would penalize employers who do not pay wages owed to an employee. For more information, please visit:

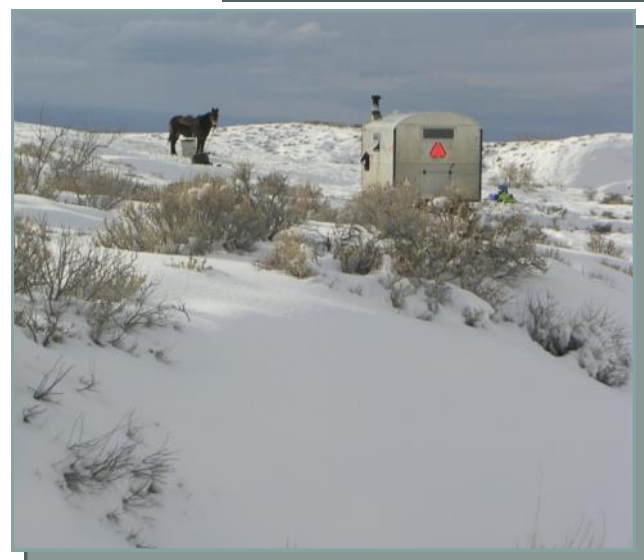
www.iwj.org/locations/colorado

Annually, 19 billion dollars are stolen through obligated extra hours and/or violations of minimum wage. This crime is often connected to trafficking people with legal work visas in this country.

In one year, 5,200 Colorado workers contacted the Colorado Department of Labor & Employment (CDLE) to report wage theft. This department receives 30,000 calls with questions related to this issue. Lack of resources and lack of authority to penalize employers who violate this law inhibit solutions. At this time, employers who ignore a request from the CDLE are not subject to any legal consequences.



HAP provides information about the options available for filing a wage theft lawsuit, but workers rarely receive a favorable outcome. In seven years, we have heard stories from workers who have suffered wage theft ranging from \$70 to \$23,000 in the service industry, construction and ranching/agriculture.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Members of the Board of Directors gathered on January 12 for an annual planning retreat to evaluate the past year and to determine priorities for 2013. The Board made an important decision for the organization to pursue legal training and certification over the next year. This certification would enable HAP to assist families with some types of immigration applications in the event of comprehensive reform.



“Over the past few years, one of the most important goals HAP has accomplished has been to build relationships with other coalitions and groups working to promote and institutionalize immigrant leadership in the movement for social change. The fruit of this labor can be seen by the emergence of young leadership on the state level in the Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition,” said Ricardo Pérez upon completing his term as President of the CIRC Board of Directors.

CAMPAIGN LAUNCH

On March 4, the **Campaign to Unite Colorado** was launched around the state. The Hispanic Affairs Committees have been planning local activities for the past several months to promote the issues most important to their communities. **Photos below/ at right:** February 1 Meeting of *Inmigrantes Unidos* of Gunnison/ March 2 Vigil to launch local actions in support of comprehensive immigration reform and more just laws in Colorado.



The detention of undocumented persons cost taxpayers \$1.8 million in 2010-2011. On average, detainees spend 22 days in jail for driving without a license.” *Colorado Fiscal Institute*



Colorado’s “Show Me Your Papers Law” (SB 90) has devastated local law enforcement budgets, while creating mistrust on the part of the immigrant community toward law enforcement. The \$13 million spent implementing this law could employ another 200 police officers per year. Please support the **“Community and Law Enforcement Trust Act & Drivers Licenses for All.”**

WELCOMING COLORADO



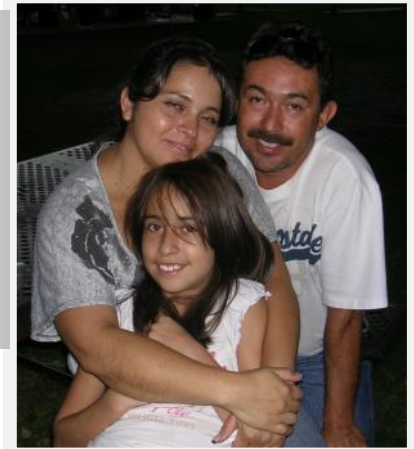
“My name is Charlotte Maes. I was born in the San Luis Valley of Colorado and grew up in Wyoming, where I worked in the fields since I was 10 years old. I lived through segregation. I used to love to go to the movies, but Hispanics had to sit in a separate section, and our only hope for work was in agriculture. I feel for the farmworkers of today because things have not changed. They do very difficult work, and they deserve decent living conditions, a better salary, and respect from the community. They are rarely thanked or recognized for the work that they do. I enjoy these meetings because fighting for social justice is the right thing to do. I like that we all sit down together to eat and plan what we want to do; I see so many possibilities now. In my experience, making a difference takes time, but it is well worth it.”

Excerpts from an interview with Charlotte, a 90-year-old volunteer active with the Welcoming Colorado campaign in Grand Junction. For more information, visit:

<http://youtu.be/k9iExuh2Rh4>



IN COLORADO,
IMMIGRANTS DESERVE
A FAIR CHANCE.

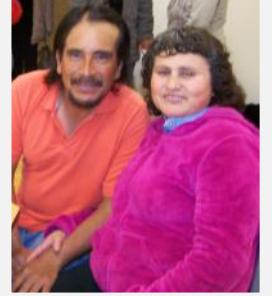


OUR FAMILIES, OUR STORIES

The Orellana family moved to the U.S. from Mexico following the collapse of the agricultural industry with the implementation of NAFTA in 1994. Like them, many farmers and ranchers were no longer able to work or sustain their families, due to the devaluation of crops such as corn. They moved to Olathe to work in agriculture. Their yearly income is less than \$26,000. Several months ago, Guadalupe had to have dental surgery. Due to malpractice, her mouth became infected and she had to spend several days in the hospital. She was billed \$10,000 for her stay. Although the government provides assistance to migrant families with documents, families like the Orellana's are not eligible. They are a very hard-working family and live below the poverty level, without health insurance or any type of benefits. They have three children in school and have spent years doing a job in this country that **no one else wants to do.**

Luis Francisco Olguín came from Zacatecas to Colorado to work in construction. He is able to provide for his family here in the U.S., as well as help his younger siblings and parents in Mexico. One day, Luis was stopped by police and reported to ICE. He spent 14 days in a detention center before seeing an immigration judge, who released him because of his lack of a criminal record. Nevertheless, Luis was ordered to leave the country under voluntary deportation. This has been a tragedy for his wife and children. **His employer has done all he could to stop the deportation, since Luis is one of his best workers,** but our current immigration system does not allow for any alternatives.

The U.S. spent \$18 billion enforcing immigration laws, more than the combined federal budgets allocated for fighting crime. FY 2012 Budget Authority.



Ellie Murillo, Antonio Vásquez, and Joel Flores of the Hispanic Affairs Committee of Grand Junction, along with Rebeca Maldonado, organized La Danza Guadalupeana to celebrate culture and promote integration. Dos Reales sponsors the group's practices. **Photos:** International Day of the Migrant, which began with a Proclamation by the City Council of Grand Junction.

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Return Service Requested