

Metro

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57 arrested in Orange, Costa Mesa sweeps for undocumented aliens

By Anita Snow
The Register

Immigration officials arrested 57 suspected undocumented aliens at gathering sites in Orange and Costa Mesa Wednesday after complaints from property owners.

"I think it'll work for a few days, but then they'll start drifting back again," said Jim Whitaker, owner of the Orange Hills Shopping Center in Orange. "Immigration would have to come back more often for it to have a permanent impact."

Immigration and Naturalization Service spokesman Joe Flanders said agents arrested 10 people at Chapman Avenue and Hewes Street in Orange about 6 a.m., and took 47 people into custody at 19th Street and Placentia Avenue in Costa Mesa about 7:30 a.m.

Flanders would not say if INS agents planned to return to the gathering sites today.

"I don't think that's been decided yet," he said. "These things are decided on a day-to-day basis."

INS agents were called to the sites by property owners, who complained about the workers who gather in the early morning hours

for employers to drive by and offer them jobs, Flanders said.

"I've never called Immigration personally, but I know some of my tenants have," Whitaker said. "They're afraid these guys are hurting their businesses. A lot of people are intimidated by (the workers)."

The third Orange County gathering site is at Fifth and Euclid streets in Santa Ana.

All three sites previously have been raided by INS agents, Flanders said.

The most recent raid was Sept. 25 at the Orange site, when INS officials arrested 17 suspected undocumented aliens.

The Orange Police Department called the INS late last month after receiving complaints daily, Police Chief Norman A. Traub said.

Police warned workers about the first raid with unsigned notices a week before it occurred.

The Orange Police Department has not called INS since the first raid, Flanders said.

After that raid, Father Allen Deck, director of Hispanic ministries for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange, criticized the Orange Police Department for notifying the INS.

Hispanics in the community would be afraid to report crimes for fear of being deported, Deck said.

During the summer, staff members of the county Human Relations Commission and county Supervisor Ralph Clark's office spent hours seeking a solution to the problem in Orange.

On some summer mornings, as many as 100 workers gathered on the corner in Yum Yum Donut Shop's parking lot.

Six county employees volunteered their time to help the workers move to El Modena Park, and later to El Modena Library, but complaints were made about both moves and the workers returned to the parking lot.

Police have said the workers do not create a crime problem. But community members have complained the crowd scares away business and intimidates passersby.

"I think there is a lot of legitimacy in the business people's concerns," said Amin David of Los Amigos of Orange County, a group of Hispanic business and professional people who look into matters affecting the Hispanic community.