

El Modena ponders the undocumented

by Bill Butler/OCN

A decision by the El Modena Center Board is expected this week on whether a large gathering of boys and men, many of them undocumented workers, should be relocated to the El Modena Center parking lot, the Orange City News has learned.

For several months community leaders, local officials and the Orange County Human Relations Commission have been studying where to relocate a growing number of people who gather each morning at the south side of Chapman Avenue on Hewes Street.

The workers, varying in age from young boys to middle-aged men, number between two dozen to 100, according to various estimates and depending on the time of morning. For years they have waited in the

Yum-Yum Donut Shop parking lot for others to drive by and offer them day work in construction, gardening, agriculture or other employment.

As a result of meetings among local leaders, the Human Relations Commission was asked to help solve what local merchants in the area say is a problem damaging to their business: too large a crowd gathering at limited facilities.

The commission in recent weeks began surveying residents near the El Modena Center on Hewes and Center streets, which is two blocks away from Chapman and has become the primary site suggested for relocation. Other sites include parks in Orange.

When the commission finished its survey, it released the results to Margaret Reister, chair of the El Modena center board, on Friday.

Reister delivered the survey results to board members Monday morning, but was unable to comment until the board voted on the issue, she said. As of press time Monday, it was not known if a decision was to be reached by yesterday.

The survey questioned 41 residents in the neighborhood of the Center, 30 of whom were homeowners.

When asked if neighbors and the undocumented workers "get along," 25 of the 30 homeowners said "Yes."

Sixteen of the 30 residents said the Center should provide services to the men, nine said it should not and five had no opinion.

The key question asked, wheth-

er the Center should allow the workers to gather at its parking lot, received a response of 10 in favor and 20 against.

Although two-thirds of the homeowners responded against the idea of relocating the men to the Center, one staff member of the commission, who asked not to be identified, said the results are more positive than they appear to be.

Because the number of people to be relocated is high, he said, a community might be expected to be unanimously against such a relocation.

If the board does not approve the proposed relocation, an undisclosed park site will be studied.