

El Modena Center to take workers

by Bill Butler/OCN

Last week a community decided not to turn its back on the unwanted. El Modena, through the El Modena Center, was willing to solve a problem too hot for either the city or county of Orange: what to do with a large gathering of undocumented workers who wait each morning for work at Chapman and Hewes streets.

By a 9-2 vote, the board of the El Modena Center, two blocks from the present gathering site, decided to allow the men to relocate to the Center's parking lot.

Within a week or two a crowd of men numbering 40 to 100 (according to various estimates) will no longer be seen each morning at the Yum-Yum Donut Shop on Chap-

man Avenue, said Robert Nava, staff member of the Human Relations Commission.

Because the number of men appearing for day work each morning grew so large, merchants in the area began complaining that their businesses were adversely affected.

Local leaders met with city officials, and the Human Relations agency was asked to help solve the problem. After surveying residents near the El Modena Center, the commission found that most felt the workers and residents "get along," although 20 homeowners out of 30 were against relocating the men to the El Modena Center parking lot.

"The community really has a negative feeling about relocating the men in their neighborhood," said Margaret Reister Monday.

Reister, who chairs the Center's board, said the El Modena Center will give the relocation plan a one-month trial.

"I think the board really felt that because they're (the men) working in the community and looking for employment that we shouldn't turn away from them."

Many of the men are undocumented workers from Mexico, and gathering on a street corner like Chapman Avenue and Hewes Street is a traditional practice among them. In El Modena's case, the parking lot of Yum-Yum Donuts is a place to hire workers.

The workers wait for local employers of construction, fruit picking, gardening or other day work.