

Orange police warn undocumented workers about raids

Fliers are part of effort to stop men from gathering on corners

By Anita Snow
The Register

ORANGE — The Police Department has warned undocumented workers it will summon U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service officers to Orange's El Modena section this week because of complaints by community members.

This past week, police delivered warning notices in Spanish to workers who gather in the Yum Yum Donut Shop parking lot at Chapman Avenue and Hewes Street.

Some mornings, as many as 100 men and teen-age boys wait for job offers.

Police have said the workers do not create a crime problem. But community members said the crowd scares away business and intimidates women and small children who must walk past.

"As you know, we have been trying to resolve the complaints of the business owners of El Modena," the notices read. "With the cooperation of everyone, the majority of the workers have been moved to different places.

"Unfortunately, the complaints have continued and it is very important that you know that the Department of Immigration will come within a week and there will be a raid," the notices conclude.

The notices are unsigned, but workers, businessmen and county officials said police officers distributed them.

"Some people don't believe Immigration will come and others don't care," said worker Oscar Sapiens, 22, of Orange. "Even if immigration comes here, in three days they'll all be back. It only takes 24 hours to get back through Tijuana."

Orange Police Chief Norm Traub was out of town until Monday and could not be reached for comment.

"I see no other alternative," said Gary Granville, an aide to Orange County Supervisor Ralph Clark. "I have talked this over with Ralph and we support the chief 100 percent.

"I think the community has tried very hard to resolve the problem. It's a no-win, no-win situation," Granville said.

Granville and several other county staff members have spent hours in El Modena during the past several weeks trying to solve the problem.

The workers were moved to two other sites within the past month, but community members complained about both moves, he said.

"We were invited into the city in May by the Police Department," said Robert Nava of the Orange County Human Relations Commission. "We were familiar with the location, but did not know about complaints by local businessmen.

In July, the El Modena Community Center's board of directors agreed to allow the men to gather at the center, which is in a residential area several blocks from the doughnut shop, Nava said. Residents, however, opposed the proposal, he said.

"We did a survey of neighborhood residents," he said. "While a large number supported having the workers at the center, an equal number — primarily Mexican-Americans — didn't want them in

the neighborhood at all. We abandoned that idea."

In mid-August, the workers were moved to El Modena Park several blocks from the doughnut shop in the opposite direction. "Most of the workers were very cooperative,"

Nava said. "They understood the problem and wanted to help."

Unfortunately, he said, many employers were uncooperative and parked across the street when they came by to pick up workers. "The workers were running across the street to get to the employers," he said. "It was really a very dangerous situation. There would have been an accident sooner or later."

About two weeks later, the group was moved to the El Modena Library parking lot. "The location at first was working out perfectly,"

Nava said. "But then school started and parents got worried about their children walking by. Soon, we knew it wasn't going to work out."

The workers since have moved to the Alameda Market next to the Yum Yum Donut parking lot and complaints from local business owners have resumed, Nava said.

Although Alameda Market owner America Miller said she did not mind the workers, others said they did.

"I don't believe Immigration is

coming out," said Steve Jezak, owner of the neighboring Mobil gasoline station. "I'll believe when I see it."

"I'm disgusted with the whole thing," said Rick Kerby, district manager for Yum Yum Donuts. "I'm seriously considering closing the store because we've lost so much business.

"They'll all be back after Immigration comes," he said. "Officials would have to come out here every day for a long time to solve the problem."