

Jupiter's El Sol also rises

Palm Beach Post Editorial (by Dan Moffett)

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Irony always has permeated the American immigration story, so it figures that the El Sol Jupiter Resource Center would open with an ironic twist last week.

For months, as they planned the center, Jupiter officials and immigration activists worried that workers might be reluctant to show up because they feared deportation or government reprisals for illegal status. As it turned out, workers showed up in large numbers - but employers stayed away, some probably fearing reprisals if they hired illegal immigrants.

But El Sol (561-748-5177) has made significant progress in the short time since it opened. With fliers, refrigerator magnets and word of mouth, organizers have recruited more employers to use the center and have closed the gap between jobs and workers. Residents and business owners throughout Palm Beach County are hiring immigrants to do work of all descriptions - from mowing lawns to painting houses to moving furniture. "We have come a long way in just one week," says Elisa Bland, the Catholic Charities division director who oversees El Sol. "We're getting more employers and workers every day."

Just getting the center up and running is an important achievement for a community that has demonstrated the political courage to find practical solutions to a complicated problem that the federal government continues to ignore. While Washington lawmakers wring their hands and trade insults, Jupiter has put a progressive plan in motion and is making it work. By giving workers and employers a place to connect, the town can crack down on immigrants soliciting jobs on street corners. By treating workers fairly, valuing their contributions to the economy and giving them a place to find social services, the town claims the moral high ground and can use it to make Jupiter a better place. Police and building inspectors can crack down on immigrants who pack houses and violate codes without hearing complaints about heavy-handedness.

The workers who have come to the center have shown a willingness to assimilate and play by the town's rules. The center's English classes have been full. By making them part of the community, Jupiter has given immigrants reason to care about what happens to the place they're living in. El Sol has the chance to be the model for Lake Worth, West Palm Beach and cities throughout South Florida that realize the corrosive effects of ignoring a problem that isn't going away.

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