

Published December 16, 2006

Immigration's effects frustrate residents

RAID AFTERMATH: MARSHALLTOWN

The actions of lawbreakers and the tactics of federal officials elicit criticism.

By LISA ROSSI

REGISTER AMES BUREAU

Marshalltown, Ia. - The tension between Caucasian residents of Marshalltown and their Hispanic neighbors has been aggravated after a raid Tuesday showed what many people already suspected: Scores of people who entered the United States illegally were working here.

The raid has reignited simmering tensions over the effects immigrants have had on Marshalltown.

Michelle Klouda of Marshalltown said she gets upset when Hispanics who are here illegally get special access to services that she must pay full price for, such as health care.

She works at a mall in Marshalltown and has no health insurance, she said.

"What about me?" she asked. "They expect us to cater to their needs."

She said she has struggled to communicate with other residents who speak no English. She notices how some plaster Mexican symbols on their cars.

"If you come to America, fly a flag," she said.

Matt Frazier and Tara Gunderson, both of Marshalltown, said they spend time with Hispanic residents - inviting them to their parties and, in the past, going to class together.

The two said they are pleased with the benefits that legal immigrants have brought to Marshalltown, such as increased business. But both are resentful of people who shirk the system.

"They are not paying taxes, and using five different names, working at Swift, and on another name, on welfare" Frazier said.

Even so, he said, the government should have done more to aid Hispanic families in communicating with each other in the aftermath of the raid this week. "They should give parents the chance to take their kids," he said.

"A lot of times, one Hispanic will make it look bad for the rest of them," Frazier added. "I have no problem with them here, as long as they want to do it legally."

The Rev. Jim Miller, a priest at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Marshalltown, is among those who have advocated for better treatment of Swift & Co. workers who were arrested.

It is difficult for immigrants to come to America legally, yet companies recruit them anyway, he said.

"I would love everyone to come in legally, but they need an avenue to do so," he said. "Yet the companies say, 'Come and work for us - all you need is a document.' "

David Titcomb, 54, is among those who do not see simple solutions for the problem of undocumented immigrants in Marshalltown. "They have to do something more substantial," he said of federal immigration enforcement officials. "This is just a Band-Aid."