

BUSINESS

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Morton Marcus
ON
BUSINESS

This land is my land, not yours

Woody Guthrie wrote: "This land is your land, this land is my land." But that is not what most of us believe.

We want exclusive rights to our land and the land around us. We want to exclude others from having the use of their land if that use might reduce our real or imagined privileges.

Let me give you a personal example so you do not think that I am picking on others and being holier than thou.

My neighbor owns a lot that lies between our houses. I want to buy half of that lot so that the remainder would be too small for anyone to build on. This, I feel would preserve a delightful wooded area both he and I enjoy and sustain the undeveloped visual pleasures from both our houses.

Note, I want to buy the land. I am not attempting to get the government to intervene. In many communities, citizens fight new developments because they feel, often correctly, that they will lose some of the amenities they currently enjoy.

Often heartbreak is involved. People who have lived for a long time in one place, nurtured their property and raised their families are disturbed that their efforts and their lifestyles will be destroyed by new developments.

A new development may bring more traffic to the area, requiring road-widening and the loss of property frontage for existing households.

What can be done to stop this desecration, as the current residents see it? The usual path is to go to the planning commission and oppose the proposed development. Every possible objection is raised; fears of "what if" are manufactured. Postponement, delay and denial of approval are sought. All of these are legitimate approaches to retard unwelcome development.

Two points, however, need to be raised.

First, the assumption made by the opponents of change is that we should value the interests of current residents over those of future residents. This is the first-come-first-served idea. I got here before you did so I have stronger rights than you have. It's not a bad way of allocating scarce resources, but it is not a sacred means of doing so.

You and I may think that we are the most important people in the world, but what obligation do we have to others?

Second, if we value something, why don't we put our money where our mouths are? Why get government to prevent development that is consistent with existing zoning? Are the concerns of the protesters more valid than the property rights of those who own the disputed land?

Americans supposedly believe in the efficiency and fairness of the marketplace. But often we are unwilling to use the marketplace to settle disputes.

I want to buy half the land next to me. That will give me and my neighbor a way of preserving our property values and the natural views we enjoy.

In the instances that I have been following, I have not heard anyone suggest buying disputed land and then controlling its subsequent use. Perhaps the people who do not want a grocery store or a new housing development near them should buy the respective properties.

By appealing to government to protect them, they are asking the authorities to proclaim their rights over those of other current landowners.

Local government officials have the difficult task of choosing among conflicting valid views. But often their task is made more difficult by those who cannot reconcile their own interests to those of others.

These problems are most prevalent in places that are experiencing rapid growth. If it is not your problem today, it could be tomorrow.

Morton Marcus is an economist, formerly at the Kelley School of Business, Indiana University.

Workers not all fly-by-nighters

Study: Day laborers are family men who get involved in communities

By PETER PRENGAMAN
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ANGELES

The immigrant day laborers who wait for work on street corners across the United States have families and attend church regularly, and the people who hire them are more likely to be individual homeowners than construction contractors.

The first nationwide study of day laborers also found that one in five has been injured on the job and nearly half have been cheated out of pay.

The study, the most detailed snapshot to date of the mostly Hispanic and often undocumented immigrants who've become a focal point in the immigration debate, was based on interviews of 2,660 workers at 264 hiring sites in 20 states and the District of Columbia.

The authors said they were surprised by the level of community involvement among men often thought of as transients.

"The day laborer corner is not as disconnected from society as people think. It's seen as a shadow economy, but that's really not the case," said professor Nik Theodore of the University of Illinois at Chicago, one of three study authors. The others were from the University of California, Los Angeles, and New York's New School University.

Standing outside a Home Depot store in suburban Burbank on Sunday, 33-year-old Raul Sanchez said that when he's not working,



Day laborers Cesar Martinez, left, and Juan Son wait for work outside a Home Depot store in Burbank, Calif., on Sunday.

or waiting for work, he's involved in a church and tried to start a soccer league for fellow day laborers. The native of Mexico has been in the United States seven years and lives with his wife and two children, ages 13 and 14.

Sometimes he worries about small work sites with little safety equipment.

"We know nobody is going to help us out if we get hurt," Sanchez said. "There are risks, but what are we going to do? Not work?"

As often as not, a day laborer's employer will be an individual rather than a labor contractor.

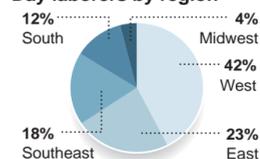
Forty-nine percent of respondents said they were regularly hired by homeowners for everything from carpentry to gardening, with 43 percent getting jobs from construction contractors. Two-thirds said they are hired repeatedly by the same employer.

Based on their interviews and counts at each hiring site, the researchers estimate there are about 117,600 day laborers nationwide but say that number is probably low. They said it would be impossible to count the number of hiring sites nationwide, since some spring up spontaneously.

Study shows tough jobs of day laborers

A new study reveals the regions and working conditions of day laborers, a majority of whom considered their jobs to be dangerous.

Day laborers by region*



Working conditions

Consider job dangerous

93%

Had a work-related injury

20%

Had an injury requiring treatment

19%

Missed work due to injury

67%

Note: Researchers interviewed 2,660 day laborers at 264 hiring sites in 20 states and the District of Columbia; conducted in July and August 2004

* Figures don't add to 100 due to rounding

SOURCE: "On The Corner: Day Labor in the United States" AP

Among the other findings based on the interviews conducted in July and August 2004:

• Three-fourths were illegal immigrants and most were Hispanic: 59 percent were from

Mexico and 28 percent from other Central American countries.

• Just over half said they attended church regularly, 22 percent reported being involved in sports clubs and 26 percent said they participated in community centers.

• Nearly two-thirds had children, 36 percent were married and seven percent lived with a partner.

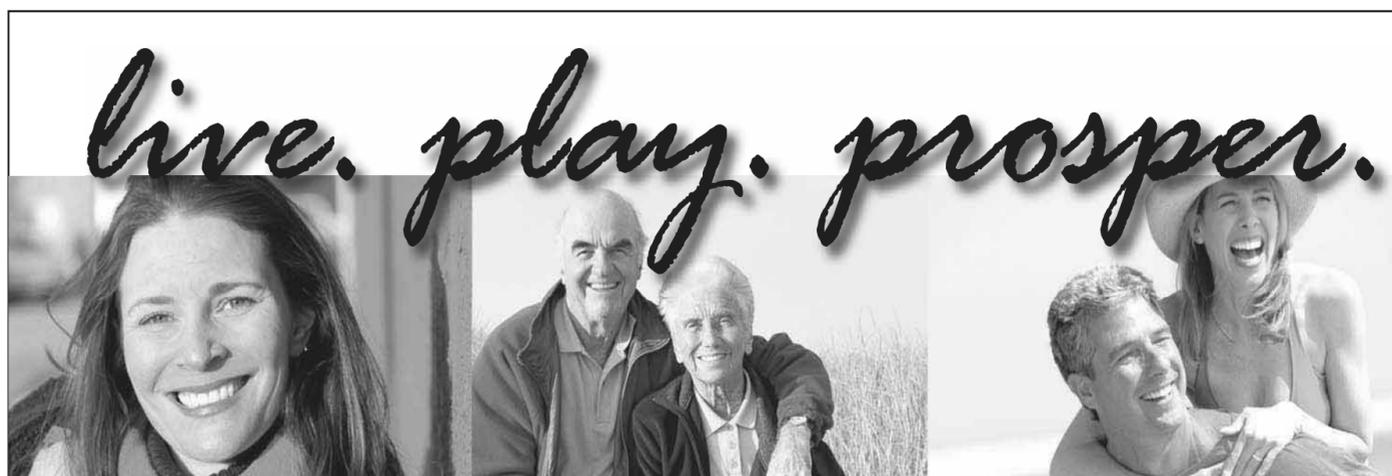
• More than 80 percent rely on day labor as their sole source of income, earning close to the 2005 federal poverty guideline of \$12,830 for a family of two.

• Of the 20 percent who reported on-the-job injuries, more than half said they received no medical care because they couldn't afford it or their employer refused to cover them.

Cesar Martinez, 45, another of the people waiting for work at the Home Depot in Burbank, is a Guatemala native who has been in the United States for 15 years without proper legal documentation.

He said he sends \$300 to \$500 home every month to support his six children, ages 2 to 14, but that sometimes an employer rips him off.

"I couldn't complain because I'm not here legally, but I was so angry because I need every cent," he said. "I'm always thinking, 'Are they going to pay me, am I going to get to work 8 hours on this job, will I get hurt doing it?'"



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Enter to win* a gift certificate to Smock Golf Course

Wednesday, January 25

Enter to win* a gift certificate to Robert's Salon and Day Spa

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