

Grant To Benefit Community Cohesion

By Bonnie Hobbs
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Always promoting unity between residents and immigrants, Alice Foltz has obtained a \$3,000 grant from the International Peace Research Association Foundation. Foltz leads the Centreville Immigration Forum (CIF), and she and others will collect data on the community's Hispanic immigrants in hopes of improving the relationship between them and the local residents.

The effort is an outreach project of Wellspring United Church of Christ, and its pastor, Al Fuentes, is a member of this foundation, which favors nonviolent conflict resolution. Accordingly, it's hoped that this project can reduce the tension and heightened, community concerns about the growth of Centreville's day-laborer population.

"We want to find out more about the immigrants in the Sully District," said Foltz. "We hope to collect stories and viewpoints from both immigrants and non-immigrants and learn how they feel about immigration."

Foltz will head the project, and participants will include Connie Rojas — day-laborer coordinator and contact with the Hispanic community, student volunteers from GMU and other local residents. Training will be provided, and those interested in helping gather the data may contact Foltz at afoltzva@verizon.net.

"We want to know what the immigrants' experience in the community is and how the residents here feel about them," she said. "We also want to collect hard data regarding the types of jobs immigrants here have and the businesses they work for, so we'll have a little better picture of the immigrants' contributions in this part of Fairfax County."

VOLUNTEERS WILL also try to ascertain how many immigrants are in Centreville and Chantilly; the cost to provide local services — schools, health care, public safety, etc. — to immigrants in the Sully District; and the reasons why the immigrants came to the Northern Virginia suburbs.

It's a year-long project, and Foltz hopes to also call on members of the



Isabel Almendarez discusses the upcoming census.



Alice Foltz.



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CIF for help carrying it out. She knows they can help make contact with local immigrants through venues such as the ESL programs held in various churches here.

Foltz discussed the grant during the Jan. 26 CIF meeting. Other topics included medical care, the upcoming census and Grace Ministries. Barb Shaiko, who heads that program at Centreville United Methodist Church, said Grace Ministries plans to offer employment development.

Funded via a job-training grant from federal stimulus funds available through the county, it would enable people to obtain training in fields such as practical nursing and jobs requiring a commercial driver's license. However, it was also noted that immigrants need help filling out job applications and other forms.

Low-income residents may receive health care through the Community Health Care Network, but getting there can pose a problem.

"Transportation is a big issue," said Foltz. "[My husband] Jerry took a fellow with diabetes to the Jennie Schmidt Clinic in Herndon."

Shaiko said it would help if there were a way people could sign up to be drivers. "Often, low-income families try to survive on one car — if they even have a car," she said. "And it's difficult for them if they have to go somewhere, such as a doctor's appointment or hypothermia shelter."

REGARDING THE CENSUS, Fairfax census coordinator Isabel Almendarez said it's critical for the U.S. government to gather complete and accurate data about its immigrant population.

"We need to know where the people are, who they are and how many there are," she said. "Government funding for things we do is based on accurate census numbers, so this is very important. We're partnering with trusted leaders in the community to help us get the word out. We keep all personal information confidential for 72 years. We only publish general statistical data, so it's safe and secure."

She said surveys will go to addresses in March and questionnaire assistance centers will be set up from March 19 to April 20 to help people fill them out. "The survey will be in six languages, including Korean and Spanish," said Almendarez. "In many households, people are doubling up, so they may need extra forms to fill out [at those addresses]."

Foltz said it may be difficult to count Centreville's immigrant population and those who come to Grace Ministries for help. "So part of what's needed is education to encourage them to participate," she

said. Foltz then suggested providing some information and, possibly, a talk about the upcoming census during the next Grace Ministries at Centreville United Methodist Church.

"It's so important that census workers be able to communicate with those taking the census survey," added Almendarez. "We want everybody to be counted."



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