

Lewisville Clamps Down on Day Labor

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Lewisville has put up new signs to discourage day laborers and the contractors who hire them in an area long known for the practice.

The signs forbid parking, stopping and standing along South Charles Street near the Stemmons Freeway. Signs previously had been posted around the nearby Huffines Plaza Shopping Center.

Landscape contractor Jimmy Atkins said police enforcement of the Lewisville crackdown has made it more difficult for him to hire the workers he needs.

"They ask that we don't stop on the street," Atkins said. "I didn't understand that."

Some other North Texas cities have opened day labor centers to provide workers and contractors with a place to gather and meet.

"That makes it a lot safer for them. It makes it safer for the community, also," said Beatrice Martinez, of the League of United Latin American Citizens.

"Right now, it's a tough time and probably we're going to see more day labor situations because of the economy and construction," she said.

But Lewisville City Councilman John Gorena fought to block a day labor center in his city.

"You hire somebody off the books, you're breaking a bunch of laws," he said. "Why do we want to allow that to happen? People are cheating the system."

Gorena is also proposing an ordinance to require immigration checks on all employees of contractors hired by the city.

"It's our tax dollars, and our tax dollars should really go to people who are in this country legally," he said.

But Martinez argues that day laborers contribute to the Lewisville economy, too.

"They buy groceries. They pay their water, light bill, gas bill," Martinez said. "So what are they doing to their own tax base when they start doing things like this?"

"I would prefer not to have to do it," said contractor Jimmy Atkins. "It's just more work for us."

Gorena said a worker's immigration status can be determined online in just a few moments. The proposed ordinance will be discussed at a Lewisville City Council retreat in the near future.

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