
Day laborers cleared from Huffines Plaza

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People driving north on the Interstate 35E service road in Lewisville may have noticed something different the last few mornings.

The day laborers are no longer standing on Huffines Plaza along the service road, hoping someone will pick them up and give them work.

Lewisville Police Chief Russ Kerbow said Thursday, "I can confirm that the Lewisville Police Department entered into an agreement with the owners of Huffines Plaza to restrict use of their private property to customers only."

He continued, "The management representative for the owner signed an affidavit that allows our officers to act as 'someone with apparent authority to act for the owner.' With signs posted saying 'Customers Only,' our officers can also contact anyone who enters the property for purposes other than to patronize one of the businesses in the shopping center to let them know that they are potentially trespassing."

Kerbow said the signs are in the process of being posted, and Lewisville officers began an education campaign on June 16 to inform day laborers and potential employers of the change.

A check of the situation Friday morning revealed that, while no day laborers were seen soliciting on Huffines Plaza property, as many as 40 or 50 were sitting on or behind a city sidewalk in the 1000 block of Charles Street, just north of the Huffines Plaza.

The day laborers stand when vehicles drive slowly down Charles Street, waving at the motorists in hopes of being chosen for work.

Kerbow said, "We will continue to monitor the day laborers who migrate north along Charles Street. Those on public property can remain there so long as they do not restrict passage on the sidewalk from others who might want to use it. The city ordinance prohibiting pedestrians from soliciting from the roadway is still in force. We will 'test' them periodically with undercover officers to ensure they are in compliance with the law."

Kerbow said he also had heard that many of the day laborers were moving onto the 7-Eleven property at Mill Street and Business 121, where a smaller number of day laborers had been convening before.

"I have heard that many of the day laborers are moving to the 7-Eleven store, but all we are telling them is that they must have permission of any private property owner before they just show up on the property," Kerbow said.

One citizen reported seeing Lewisville police officers talking with people who had attempted to pick up a day laborer for work.

"An employer picking up a day laborer is not in and of itself a criminal offense of this state or by city ordinance," Kerbow said. "At Huffines Plaza, however, the employer may be considered trespassing since he's on the property and not considered a customer."

He added, "Of course, we would have to prove he had received notice that trespassing is a Class B misdemeanor, punishable upon conviction of a fine up to \$2,000, confinement in jail for a term not to exceed 180 days or both such fine and confinement."

Kerbow also said it was a coincidence that the action at Huffines Plaza came three days after the election of John Gorena to Place 4 on the Lewisville City Council. Gorena has been trying for two years to get the city of Lewisville to do something about the day laborers soliciting work at Huffines Plaza and at the 7-Eleven.

Gorena said, "Though I have been encouraging the city to do something about this issue for about two years, it does not matter if the current efforts are due to my involvement or not. Who gets credit does not matter. What matters is that the city is doing something. It is a good start and we must continue the effort to enforce the laws of the country. The police are doing a great job."

Winston Edmondson Jr., a candidate for mayor in May, had campaigned on promises to work hard to ease a problem of illegal immigrants in the city."

Edmondson said Friday, "This is a big victory for the city of Lewisville. Although the day labor problem at Huffines Plaza wasn't necessarily the most important issue we faced, it was the most visible."

He added, "I'm proud of the people in Lewisville, especially in Old Town, who never gave up hope. The momentum is on their side now, with John Gorena's city council victory and the city finally taking the exact steps we've been begging them to take in regards to Huffines Plaza. It's exciting, and I know that citizens will continue to fight for this city that we love. My hat goes off to the Lewisville Police Department. Officers repeatedly told me that they wanted to do more to combat our illegal alien problem, but weren't allowed to. Now that they can, they're doing an amazing job."