

Spay bill withdrawn, B4

www.montereyherald.com



# Law center seeks market workers

By CLAUDIA MELÉNDEZ SALINAS  
Herald Salinas Bureau

The Watsonville Law Center is looking for former workers at La Esperanza supermarkets who may be entitled to receive a slice of the \$610,000 settlement awarded in a class-action lawsuit.

On behalf of Guillermo Melendez, a butcher's assistant, and Jose Contreras Moreno, a stocker, the center filed a lawsuit in 2006 against the small supermarket chain for violations to the state labor code, which included failure to pay overtime and give the workers breaks.

The suit claimed the chain, which has four stores in Salinas and one in Soledad, paid its employees a fixed salary regardless of the hours each person worked, thus avoiding

overtime pay. La Esperanza disputed the allegations, according to Dori Rose Inda, an attorney with the law center. Owners claimed they did nothing wrong, but they cooperated with the case and encouraged mediation. The case was settled in Santa Cruz Superior Court before the trial was set to start.

Judge Robert B. Atack approved a preliminary settlement in May, and before the final approval is granted, the law center has to contact as many of the plaintiffs as possible, Rose Inda said.

Two-thirds of the money — \$396,000 — will be divided among former workers according to a formula that considers weekly salaries

Please see Lawsuit page B2

## Lawsuit

From page B1

and months worked between Jan. 9, 2002, and March 15, 2007. How much each person will get will be calculated after the entire pool of plaintiffs responds, Rose Inda said. Melendez is getting \$14,000 and Contreras \$10,000.

There are more than 500 low-wage employees — mostly janitors, cashiers, stockers and baggers — who belong to the class, Inda said. "It's a good settlement for

the workers," Inda said. "There's an interest the owners have in the stores to continue to do business so they can employ workers there's an interest in being paid for wages that were not paid for. That's a balance that happen."

Former workers at Esperanza market can be reached at 722-2845 for information.

Claudia Meléndez can be reached at cmelendez@montereyherald.com.

# Telecom contracts in many languages?

By Clint Swett - Bee Staff Writer  
Published 12:00 am PDT Thursday, July 26, 2007

State utility regulators are scheduled to vote today on requiring telecommunications companies to provide more support for non-English speakers, including offering contracts in their native languages.

The expected approval by the California Public Utilities Commission in San Francisco comes as advocates for those with limited English skills say many of their constituents can't understand the complex and confusing telecommunications contracts required to get service.

Henry Martin, an attorney for the Watsonville Law Center, said he represents many low-income people, including Spanish-speaking farmworkers. He said he's seen clients hit with \$1,000 phone bills because their contracts were in English, and they weren't told they would incur charges if they used their wireless phones out of state or in Mexico -- even though

'(Immigration fraud) has very severe and permanent consequences for families who have lived here many years, and for kids who were born and raised here, and know no other home. It's very sad.'

DORI ROSE INDA, ATTORNEY

# Immigration fraud hits home front

## Area Latinos getting fleeced by 'notarios'

By JEANENE HARLICK  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Immigration fraud does more than empty pocketbooks. It can tear families apart.

This fraud has existed for decades. Those in this country illegally are easy targets. The victims often don't know U.S. laws and, because of their status, do not report when they have been swindled. But immigration officials say there has been an upsurge — locally and nationally — in the recent tightening of immigration laws and resulting panic among Latino aliens.

In the worst cases, it destroys an immigrant's chance of ever becoming a legal resident or citizen of the United States, and can wipe out a family's life savings.

"At least hundreds have been hurt (on the Central Coast)," said Dori Rose Inda, an attorney with the nonprofit Watsonville Law Center. "It has very severe and permanent consequences for families who have lived here many years, and for kids who were born and raised here, and know no other home.

It's very sad."

The perpetrators are so-called "immigration consultants" who act like lawyers but aren't. Using notary public, tax and even travel agencies as fronts, these consultants charge high fees for promises they rarely deliver on. Offering themselves as guides to the Immigration and Naturalization Service's labyrinthine application process, the consultants — out of a combination of both greed and incompetence, crime fighters say — sign people up for residency programs they don't qualify for, alerting immigration authorities to an alien's illegal status in the process.

"It's becoming a major concern in the community," said Jorge Sifuentes, immigration program director for Catholic Charities in Watsonville.

It's also big business. The problem has become so severe in Santa Cruz and Monterey counties that Congressman Sam Farr, D-Carmel, recently created a task force to combat it. Joining organizations such as Cali-

Please see IMMIGRATION on Page A13

