

Center Provides a Haven for Latino Workers

By Stephanie Susnjara

Educate. Empower. Employ. This is the mantra of Neighbors Link, the Mount Kisco-based nonprofit that serves and supports the 4,000 Latinos who comprise a quarter of the town's population.

Neighbors Link is a fully-staffed center, offering comprehensive programs that reflect its mission "to strengthen our community by actively enhancing the healthy integration of recent Latino immigrants."

"When the center first opened its doors in 2001, there was quite a bit of hostility toward day workers crowding the streets," said Carola Otero Bracco, the organization's executive director. Today the center is a haven for day laborers. Approximately 6,000 day jobs a year are negotiated through the Hiring Site at Neighbors Link and its Job Bank for more skilled workers.

Each week, the center's café and recreation room provides a relaxed

environment for over 400 workers to socialize and job network.

Other programs at Neighbors Link include English as a Second Language, tutoring, computer classes, after-school tutoring at Mount Kisco Elementary School, a nutrition

program, a custom-sewing program and much more.

"Three women from our sewing program have successfully

started their own businesses, and are now earning income by making very fine draperies and upholstery," said Ms. Bracco.

The center also offers on-site help and counseling for personal and family issues such as housing and homelessness, medical and mental health, family budgeting and immigration issues.

Over the past few years Neighbors Link has been partnering with the Mount Kisco Police Department to run community meetings with Latino residents in order to foster



Neighbors Link has been helping educate Latino workers for years.

better communication and understanding.

"It's important for members of the community to learn where these people come from and what kind of hardships they have escaped," said Bracco, who finds the community-at-large to be "progressive in trying to treat people with dignity and respect."

The holiday season at Neighbors Link is filled with various celebrations, including a tree-trimming day and special holiday meals provided by various faith-based institutions throughout the region. An emergency shelter program is also available for those in need.

One of the best ways to help Neighbors Link year round is to hire its workers, many of whom have participated in job training programs at the center. "Recently housekeepers participated in a training program on how to clean with organic, safe products," said Bracco.

The Neighbors Link Worker Center/Hiring Site is open from 7am to 7pm, 365 days a year. At the Work Center, manager Isaac Marquez assists those seeking unskilled or skilled workers. Clients can choose a worker or use the popular lottery system created by the workers themselves, which gives everyone an equal chance at getting a job.

Luisa Granda-Rodriguez coordinates the Job Bank for those in need of more skilled laborers, including housekeepers, stone and tile masons, painters, gardeners, office cleaners, servers at parties in the home.

For more information on Neighbors Link, visit www.neighborslink.org. To hire a worker, contact Luisa Granda-Rodriguez at 914-666-3410, ext. 11.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer at Neighbor's Link, contact program and volunteer manager Shirley Acevedo Buontempo at 914-666-3410, ext. 16, or email her at: sbuontempo@neighborslink.org.



Students in ESL (English as a Second Language) class at the Neighbors Link community center in Mount Kisco, NY

Got something to say? Write a blog!

By Ben Lang

Every time I surf the web, I stumble upon another new blog. A blog, short for "web log" is an online diary, usually maintained by an individual or a small group with regular articles on a specific subject.

A web site, on the other hand, is the official address and location of a web-based business.

Because of their focus on a specific subject, blogs have become extremely popular and are free sources of specialized information.

Some of the most popular blogs include TechCrunch and Perez Hilton. TechCrunch, about technology

start-ups, receives over eight million visits a month - or one-thirty-seventh of the U.S. population! Perez Hilton is a source of gossip and snarky opinions about the daily happenings in Hollywood and gets over 20 million visits per month.

Not every blog receives millions of visits. Many like mine, www.benlang.com, attract just a few thousand readers a month. I focus on advice for young entrepreneurs. It might not pay my college tuition but I don't need to ask for allowance anymore.

How do blogs make money? Primarily from advertising and

sponsorship. Most small bloggers can't make a living just from their blogs, but they can help supplement their income.

Businesses are increasingly setting up their own blogs, not for the advertising revenues but in order to attract customers. Blogs are great marketing tools that allow companies to show their expertise and share their knowledge. A plumber, for example, can create a plumbing blog or contribute to a do-it-yourself blog.

You don't have to create your own blog to become a well-known

blogger. You can spread your gospel by writing for someone else's blog. Most blogs will take and post articles from qualified contributors.

Should you decide to become a blogger, all you have to do is use a platform such as Blogger by Google, Wordpress or Typepad. Then decide on a template and you're ready to start blogging. Or you can hire a web design or PR firm to have it done for you professionally.

Share your knowledge and become a blogger! If you need any help, feel free to contact me: b@langonline.com.