

USF and Mexican Consulate reach out to immigrants

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Spanish Professor Ingrid Goobar-Szleifer not only helps Spanish students at the University, but also the Spanish residents in the Joliet area. Some of the things Goobar-Szleifer has done: planned two Mexican Mobile Consulate visits to USF, planned two naturalization workshops at USF, and is planning a Naturalization Ceremony, where immigrants will actually become U.S. citizens in the USF auditorium.

From May 25th-28th, the second Mexican Mobile Consulate was at the University to help Mexican immigrants get certain documentation. St. Francis also hosted the Consulate last year.

Documentation was given to close to 1,200 Mexicans, however about three times that many people lined the streets around St. Francis for a chance to meet with representatives from the Mexican Consulate.

“We worked pretty hard through those four days,” Goobar-Szleifer said. “I had the help of many volunteers.” Nursing students, members of Unidos Vamos Alcanzar (UVA), students from other colleges, and members of the Latino Hispanic Coalition in Joliet all donated their time to help the effort.

UVA officers Michelle Martinez, Daniella Almazan, and students Mary Valerugo and Maribel Gonzalez were also there to lend a hand. Karina Martinez, who is also a UVA officer sent her family in her place on one day since she couldn't make it.

“I had a lot of people offering to help me out and make donations of many kinds,” said Goobar-Szleifer. “Alicia Morales and myself opened up and closed down shop I guess you could say.”

Lorena Brito recruited several Spanish-speaking volunteers from her church.

“I was, and am, very grateful for everyone's help and support, from security to Sodhexo, to everyone who came by and offered a smile to the visitors,” Goobar-Szleifer said.

Unfortunately, not everyone that came to the event could be helped. Many people were turned away. “We corrected some of the mistakes we made last year in terms of how we approached the community to let people know this was happening and we had an incredible turnout,” Goobar-Szleifer said.

By 4 in the morning people were lined up on the street waiting for the Consulate to arrive at 9am, Goobar-Szleifer said. She knew right away that not all of them would be able to be served.

Those turned away were directed to other locations that would have a Mobile Consulate

and told when they would be available. They were also told what information they needed to have in order to receive their documentation. Some didn't have all of the papers required to acquire any documentation.

Two forms of documentation were available for those who visited the Mobile Consulate. These were a matricula consular and a Mexican passport. The matricula consular acts like a drivers license. Mexicans can utilize it as identification at airports, for example. People could also get new Mexican or renew an outdated one.

Many organizations that work closely with Mexicans in the Joliet area have decided to accept these as forms of identification.

"People who aren't citizens in this country can't cash a check or cannot get a library card, you're pretty much nobody if you don't have a document," said Goobar-Szleifer.

It is important for people who are not citizens of this country to have these documents because of security reasons. It is important to have a record of that person, and that the Consulate of that person's country can account for that person.

Goobar-Szleifer said it wasn't hard to get St. Francis to host these visits. "I think USF has a real interest reaching out to the Latino community. I thought this was a very concrete project, and this is something people really need," she said. "It helps the community, and it helps the community realize that USF exists and is reaching out."

Aside from the Mexican Mobile Consulate visits, St. Francis will is also holding two immigration and naturalization workshops. One was held on September 16th in the studio theater, and the other will be held on October 26th, from 6 to 8 p.m. in the auditorium.

During these workshops, officers from the United States Citizenship and Immigration service will be answering questions that immigrants might have about becoming citizens of the United States.

"It is a very involved process, becoming a citizen, and immigrants that want to become citizens have a lot of questions that can be answered by these officers during the workshops," Goobar-Szliefer said.

The workshops will comprise of a question and answer portion where officers will answer general questions that immigrants might have. Following the general question and answer portion, some officers will be staying to answer individual questions that immigrants have. The immigrants attending the workshops are encouraged to bring their files and papers with them.

"These workshops are directed to all those who have fulfilled all of the legal steps, no matter how many years it has taken them to obtain their permanent residency, to ask questions about what to do next to become naturalized citizens," Goobar-Szleifer said.

And on November 17th, from 11 am to 1pm, USF will hold a Naturalization Ceremony here in the auditorium. A judge will be present to officially declare everyone who has fulfilled the requirements natural citizens.

“I’ve always cared for other people. I’m an immigrant myself. I’ve been through a lot of things, but again, having had an education I came into this country having a lot of facilities that other people do not have,” Goobar-Szleifer said.

“I always promised myself that I would always help others because I did get help myself. It just feels good when you are helping someone who really needs your help.”