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New low-wage earners center opens

Posted by [The Republican Newsroom](#) June 11, 2007 21:13PM

By **JO-ANN MORIARTY**
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SPRINGFIELD - The Anti-Displacement Center, which had a name change and a facelift, today unveiled a new two-story worker center that was built by Anti-Displacement Project members and unionized workers on their own time to improve the plight of low-wage earners.

It is now called the Alliance to Develop Power Worker Center/Casa Obrera, which is an affiliated member of the Pioneer Valley Central Labor Council and member of the AFL-CIO. The mission of the new center at 130 Union St. is to prevent the exploitation of hourly wage earners.

George Noel, director of the Massachusetts Department of Labor, represented Gov. Deval L. Patrick at today's ribbon cutting. He told the 100 community advocates, union leaders and workers and day laborers that the administration was committed to ending the unfair treatment of workers.

"The underground economy exploits workers and depresses wages for all workers and it robs the commonwealth of millions of dollars," said Noel, a former union leader.

The ADP works to protect the wages of workers in the region, especially to expose contractors who violate the state's prevailing wage laws, which require that workers on public projects be paid a rate based on union wages.

Eddie Acosta, the national coordinator of the AFL-CIO Work Center campaign, said this is the first time a center has been built by organized labor working with a community advocacy organization.

The renovation work was funded through the volunteer work of ADP members and unionized workers, and supplies were subsidized through two grants awarded to the ADP by the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts.

Janice Fine, who teaches at Rutgers University in Newark and is the author of "Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream," which was published last year, called the advocacy work being done at the South End facility, "groundbreaking" because it spotlighted "the residential construction industry" and targeted specific contractors for violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938. Last year, ADP reported to state authorities that a Canton company - Reliable Window and Siding - was breaking the state wage law at an overhaul of an apartment complex in Springfield. The attorney general ordered the company to pay \$95,000 in unpaid wages and \$10,000 in penalties.

"My study found very few examples of true partnerships between unions and worker centers," Fine said. "The fact that we are standing here today with the national AFL-CIO, the state Federation of Labor and the Carpenters' Union, and the fact that Casa Obrera will be a chartered affiliate of the Pioneer Valley AFL-CIO from its inception makes it a unique case."

Sandy Felder, the Northeast Regional Director of the AFL-CIO, said that out of the more than 500,000 construction jobs last year, two out of three



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workers were immigrants.

Paul Bulmer, a member of the executive board of the Local 108 of the carpenters' union, said at first he resented new immigrants seeking work but now realizes that he has more in common with them because they, like him, want a decent wage and fair treatment on the work site and they'll be more successful if they join forces.

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