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Advocates blame fear, fees for lack of amnesty applicants

By Teresa A. Parsons

Flaminio has never lived a furtive, underground existence as one imagines an illegal alien would, even though he's been in the United States more than 10 years.

He has worked and attended college. He has never even changed his name (except for this article, for which he asked to remain anonymous out of fear that his comments might in some way prejudice his chances for legalization).

But he has lied to friends and associates about his nationality. He has never dared to visit Canada or the southern United States, although travel was one of the dreams that first brought him from his South-American homeland to the United States as a tourist.

Because Flaminio has long wanted to leave the lies and the fear behind, to "participate freely" in life around him, he was among the first local people to apply for legalization once the federal immigration reform law became effective in May.

"I cannot say I have suffered or that I have been abused by the system," he said. "Still, it is difficult as a Christian to lie on an application. Honesty is important to feeling good about yourself, to feeling at peace with yourself."

While Flaminio's lifestyle does not fit the stereotype of an illegal alien, he is typical of the local men and women who have applied for legalization to date, according to James Delaney, coordinator of the Catholic Family Center's legalization efforts as well as its Refugee Resettlement Program.

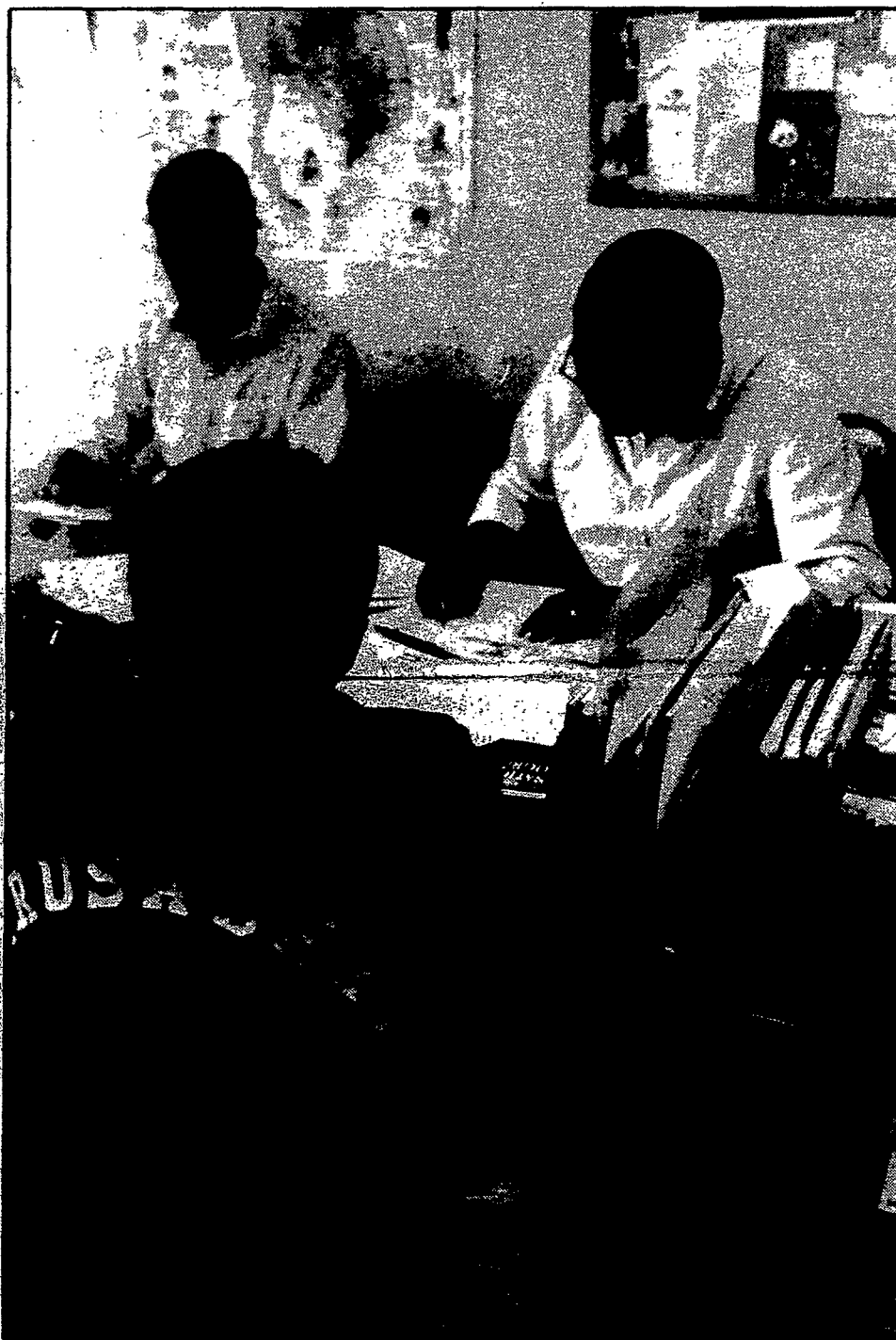
"Most cases so far have been pretty sophisticated, middle-class people," he said. "These are not the stereotypical poor and uneducated people were led to expect."

Since early May, staff working with Catholic Family Center, one of several local agencies designated by the INS to screen applicants for legalization, have interviewed approximately 73 candidates, Delaney said.

Cubans and Haitians constitute the largest category of applicants to date with 37. Twenty-two applicants for general legalization have also been interviewed, along with six farmworkers and two registry applicants (those who have been in the U.S. since January, 1972).

Catholic Family Center has already referred nearly a dozen applications to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) district office in Buffalo. Other applications are still being investigated or are awaiting further documentation.

Meanwhile, a few applications each day are trickling into the INS Buffalo district office, which covers the area of New York state west



Haitians comprise the largest local group of illegal aliens to apply for legalization since May 5, when the nation's new immigration law took effect. Sothones-Pierre Philippe (right), a Catholic Family Center counselor, and Martin Duffy, a volunteer legalization assistant, interview one of 37 Haitians who have already begun the process.

of Rochester. Roughly one-third of the 86 applications for legalization filed at the office so far have come from the Rochester area, according to Winston Barrus Jr., assistant district director for legalization.

While Barrus could not say just how many applicants the INS expected, he acknowledged that the actual turnout has been lower than expected. "People are concerned about the confidentiality aspect," he said. "To be eligible, they have to have been in this country for at least five years. That's a lot to risk if you've settled somewhere with your family."

"I think once some applications are approved, more people will begin to come forward," he added.

Delaney described the response from the INS' Buffalo office as "very, very, very accommodating."

"They have sent people to the INS office in Rochester to take applications, which was very nice," he said. "They also say that they intend on being very flexible with the documentation."

"Of course, the proof of the pudding is in what will happen to the applications that have been approved at the district level once they reach the regional level," Delaney added.

On the other hand, there have been snags. Brockport-area organizers have tried for the past five weeks to obtain forms for doctor certification from the INS. Currently, the only two doctors certified to perform medical exams required by the legalization process are in Rochester.

Applicants for legalization may have been fewer in number than anticipated, but Delaney doubts whether his limited staff and resources could accommodate any more. "Just one application, if you do it right, is going to consume a lot of time," he said. "Fifteen applicants a month is about as much as we can handle well at this point!"

Catholic Family Center's capacity to handle cases received a boost this month with the addition of Martin Duffy, a volunteer working through a Georgetown University-sponsored program. The son of Irish immigrants, Duffy enrolled in the six-month program after earning degrees in Spanish and government from Georgetown this spring. He plans to study law eventually, but first wanted a chance to see the law applied.

So far, Duffy has concentrated his efforts on organizing field offices and visiting migrant camps to encourage people to apply for legalization.

Father Larry Tracy, pastoral assistant for the Diocese of Rochester's Spanish Apostolate, suspects that word has still not reached many

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