

League is about more than sport

On most Sundays in the summer, between 300 and 500 people surround the soccer fields behind the Hamlin Town Hall, cheering on their favorite teams. These people aren't just watching typical town-recreation soccer teams, however.

Most of the spectators gathered at the fields are migrant farm workers and their families, and they're watching teams from the Farmworker Soccer League square off against each other. The league, which is a little more than three years old, is sponsored by the Centro Independiente de Trabajadores Agrícolas. Known in English as the Independent Farmworker Center, CITA is a farm-worker-led organization that seeks to address issues faced by farm workers in New York state. CITA is directed by Aspacio Alcantara, an immigrant from the Dominican Republic.

The soccer league comprises 12 teams, and each team is made up of between 16 and 20 farm workers. Many of the players are young men, but men in their late 30s and early 40s also play in the league, Alcantara said. Many of the team captains are CITA board members, he added.

CITA's goal is farm-worker empowerment, and the organization sometimes uses the league as a way to spread information among the farm-worker community. With so many members of the community in one place, CITA can easily spread information about the issues farm workers face, such as the struggle to gain civil rights.

"The farm-worker community is here, and they want to be treated like equals in the community," Alcantara said. "They need to improve their lives for a better future for their families."

— Jennifer Bürke



On most Sundays during the summer, area migrant farm workers participate in a Farmworker Soccer League at Hamlin Town Park. Above, Guillermo Lagunas (left), a player for the Zacatepec team, battles with Javier Solis of the Morelia team as they play through a downpour.



Leticia Rodriguez and her 1-year-old son, Jotzan Torres, wait patiently in the shade for husband and father Oscar Torres to finish his match. In the background, players for the Jaguares team take a half-time water break.



A farm worker wearing cowboy attire watches the flurry of action from the sidelines. In northern regions of Mexico, where many area migrant farm workers and their families are from, cowboy-style dress is common on days of rest.