



Mexico officials pay visit to area

By Larissa Chinwah | Daily Herald Staff

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Maria Perez hasn't visited her family in Mexico or traveled outside the United States since arriving here more than a decade ago.

But in a couple of months, Perez and her 11-year-old son Sergio will take their first vacation off the mainland now that Perez has her Mexican passport.

Perez was among about 200 Mexicans who Thursday obtained passports and a Mexican identification card called a "matricula consular" at St. Stephens Church, 225 N. Kennedy Drive, Carpentersville.

The documents are issued by the Mexican consulate general in Chicago.

The agency set up a mobile consulate at the church and will issue identification cards and passports until Sunday.

"It is important for her to get a passport so she can travel," Sergio said. "We are planning to go to Hawaii in a couple of months."

Francisco Valdes, consul for the mobile consulate, said the agency will provide about 400 documents per day during the four-day visit in Carpentersville.

Carpentersville, where Hispanics make up almost 40 percent of the population, gained national attention in late 2006 when two trustees introduced an ordinance that would fine landlords and business owners who rent to or hire illegal immigrants.

The proposal was tabled indefinitely.

"We are here to give services to Mexicans in the community," Valdes said. "Instead of people going to Chicago, we bring the services to them. People don't want to lose a day of work."

Appointments are required and Valdes said all openings in Carpentersville have been filled.

The card, which looks similar to a driver's license, are valid for five years and include a local address, photograph and date of birth of the holder.

Matricula cards cost \$27 each, while passports valid for three or six years cost \$74 or \$101, respectively.

A birth certificate is required to apply for the card, Valdes said.

The card cannot be used in lieu of a driver's license or to obtain one in Illinois. It also cannot be used to register to vote or as proof of immigration status or residency.

Most often, Valdes said, the cards are used to open bank accounts, enroll children in school and as a form of identification for bill paying.

Illinois is among several states that recognize the matricula cards.

But critics say the card enables illegal immigrants to work and live in the United States.

"The FBI has said the matricula card is not a secure document," said Rick Biesada of the Chicago Minuteman Project, which is planning to protest the mobile consulate Saturday.

"This is a breeder document for illegals to get other documents," Biesada said.