

### City Accepts Mexican Matricula Cards

**BY BOB SEIDENBERG - Evanston Review - 6/24/04**

Most people applying for city services, even those as basic as obtaining a birth certificate, have to produce some form of identification, and usually forms that include a photograph.

Aracely Canchola, the city's outreach specialist the past four years, had only been on the job only a short time when she received a call from an employee in the vital statistics division of the city's Health Department. The employee reported that someone was trying to obtain a birth certificate and "showing this card, but I don't know what it is," Canchola said, recalling the conversation.

The form of identification, it turned out, was a Matricula Consular identification card - a sort of ID card issued by the Mexican government for Mexican nationals living in other countries.

The cards, each of which includes a photograph, were fairly unknown at the time, but they are starting to gain wider use.

Evanston joined a number of other cities, including Chicago, Kankakee, Oak Park and Rockford, in approving a resolution last week supporting their use.

Canchola said the Mexican government actually began issuing the cards back in the 1880s, but it wasn't until recently, because of the number of undocumented workers in the United States, that the cards have reached such popularity.

To receive the cards, Mexican nationals must provide proof of Mexican citizenship, as well as proof of identity and U.S. residency, and make payment to the Mexican consulate, said Jay Terry, director of health and human services, in a memo to council members.

Some groups, such as the Washington, D.C.-based Federation for American Immigration Reform, have raised objections. The group charges that consular ID cards are only needed by people "who aren't legally in the U.S. in the first place."

"Indeed, relying on the Mexican matricula card for identification," the group said in a position paper on the issue, "is tantamount to admitting that the bearer is in the U.S. illegally, as no one here legally has a need for one."

### **Lucrative clients**

The group maintains that those here illegally are seen by banks as a potentially lucrative client base for the handling charges on the money now being sent out of the country.

But a number of people active in the community, including U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-9th, either spoke or wrote in support of the resolution, citing the greater economic and personal security the cards would provide.

"Matricula consular cards are simply identification cards; they do not legalize the status of any immigrant nor can they be used to obtain public benefits," Schakowsky said in a letter to council members urging approval of the resolution.

Moreover, she said, the cards "can serve as valuable tools for law enforcement and decrease the need of undocumented immigrants to obtain fraudulent identification documents.

"If persons have a valid form of identification," wrote Schakowsky, "they are more likely to report crimes and other suspicious behavior without fearing immigration trouble for themselves and

their family members."

The cards also are important for economic reasons, she and others said. Many Latinos, particularly immigrant families, lack access to basic financial services, Schakowsky said. She said recent surveys found that 62 percent of immigrants with incomes below \$20,000 do not have bank accounts.

"Yet a relationship to a mainstream financial institution has a long-term positive financial impact on immigrant families and the communities they reside," Schakowsky said.

She said the cards not only bolster communities' economic prosperity; they also deter "crimes and predatory schemes against immigrants who might otherwise be carrying around a lot of cash or are reluctant to report crimes to local police."

Currently, many undocumented Mexicans use currency exchanges for their financial transactions, paying exorbitant fees, said Saul Boscan, Hispanic product manager at Fifth Third Bank, which operates a branch here at 1710 Maple Ave.

"They were paying huge money to get their checks cashed and buying money orders to be able to pay their utility bills," he said.

He said the cards received an important boost last year when the government, issuing final rules in relation to the U.S.A. Patriot Act, cited the matricula consular cards as a legitimate form of identification.

Soon after, officials at Fifth Third Bank ruled that the cards would be accepted with no other form of ID needed, he said.

The cards, in addition to a photograph, carry an identification number that is similar to Social Security numbers.

Until recently, library officials had required an Illinois driver's license, or state of Illinois ID card with a local address, in order to obtain library services.

Library Director Neal Ney said that if a borrower could not produce those forms of identification, then some other form of picture ID and means of verifying a local address would be accepted.

He said that under a change in policy approved at the last Library Board meeting, an identification card from a state or national government, such as the Matricula Consular card, will be accepted.

Canchola said the cards "basically create a way that Hispanic residents can be more integrated into the community. She said that of the 400 families or so she sees, she has no firm figure on the number of undocumented Mexican nationals.

She said a number are what is referred to as "mixed" - that is, one parent may be a citizen of Mexico while the rest of the family members have been born in the United States. In some cases, Mexican citizens came here as students or tourists with legal visas, but they later became undocumented.

Whatever the case, "the reality is they are already in the community," Canchola said. "They are working and their children are U.S. citizens.

"They are participating in the communities, and this is an easier way to be identified."