

Family Values on the Border

"Angel" brings life to the desert and canyons

Dancing in the face of guns, delivering blankets and food and water to those in desperate need and fighting for human rights — that's how "border angel" Enrique Morones spends his time.

Morones, former president of San Diego's Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and former vice president of the San Diego Padres, founded an organization called Border Angels 21 years ago.

And on Thursday, Nov. 29, he told several hundred people in the UO's Knight Law School that his organization is needed now more than ever.

The UO's Multicultural Center sponsored the event, which began with Guadalupe Quinn, Lane County regional coordinator for immigrant rights group CAUSA, describing an Oregon issue: Gov. Ted Kulongoski's recent executive order concerning driver's licenses.

On Nov. 16, Kulongoski signed Executive Order #07-22. It requires driver's license applicants to provide a valid social security number, a valid foreign passport with unexpired documentation from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service or other USCIS documents. Quinn handed out a flyer asking the audience members to contact the governor opposing the executive order, which advocates say will add to the climate of fear for undocumented immigrants, who will now

not be able to get a driver's license — which means, among other consequences, that they cannot buy car insurance. (For more information on the executive order, visit www.causaoregon.org)

UO assistant professor Edward Olivos introduced Morones, saying that since the North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect in 1994, many Latinos have come to the U.S. to escape poverty and that NAFTA is "causing a demographic shift in the U.S."

Morones continued Olivos' theme, giving vivid examples of his reasons for founding Border Angels. Border Angels, a nonprofit group, consists of hundreds of volunteers who deliver water, food and clothing to various drop sites in the canyons near San Diego where many migrant workers live and to the desert where many immigrants cross the border illegally. Since California built a wall across the border, Morones said, between 4,500 and 10,000 immigrants have died in less hospitable desert crossings.

Morones explained that the U.S. has less than 5 percent of the world's population of "illegal immigrants," who number 250 million total (with around 12 million in the U.S.). He also said that when those opposed to the undocumented workers say immigrants should "follow rules and get in line" for a visa, "there is no line for poor people."

Morones, a Catholic, began Border Angels

because of his faith, following Matthew 25:35, in which Jesus says (according to the parable of the sheep and the goats), "When I was hungry, who gave me to eat? When I was thirsty, who gave me to drink?"

"It's family values, that's how I got started," he said. And with the encouragement of Ethel Kennedy, he became much more vocal about the issue of immigrant rights. Border Angels helped undocumented workers and families living in canyons affected by the wildfires near San Diego a month ago. Morones recalled going out to fields and asking the farm managers to let their workers leave the area during the fire. "But they didn't want to stop working," he said, and so Border Angels, among other organizations, tried to keep migrant workers safe. Ultimately, he said, of the 11 people who died in the fire, 8 were undocumented immigrants.

In 2006, just after the December 2005 passage in the U.S. House of the anti-immigrant Sensenbrenner bill, Border Angels and Morones' other organization, Gente Unida, organized "Marcha Migrante" from Sacramento to Washington, D.C., to protest. In February of 2007, Marcha Migrante II went from San Diego to Brownsville, Texas, and in Feb. 2008, Marcha Migrante III will come up the West Coast, he said, "for the forgotten migrants of Washington and Oregon."

In between tales of resisting the anti-immi-



'These are the stories of real people; real people are dying.'

—ENRIQUE MORONES

grant Minutemen, once with boom boxes and a party atmosphere, Morones talked about giving water, food and medical care to two men whose young sons later called him to give him thanks. He also told of a woman crossing with her 15-year-old son, Jesús, and her 7-year-old daughter. "She literally died in the arms of Jesus," he said, after a smuggler abandoned the family in the desert.

"These are the stories of real people," he said. "Real people are dying." And Border Angels is trying to stop the deaths. To contribute money or for more information, go to www.borderangels.org or call (619) 269-7865. **ew**

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