

Lawyer: State's immigrant population growing

Susser dispels myths surrounding Hispanics

BY SHERRY F. PRUITT
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JONESBORO — A Memphis immigration attorney told an audience of some 60 human resource professionals that Arkansas had the fastest growing immigrant population in the country from 2000 to 2005.

Lynn Susser of the Siskind, Susser and Bland law firm in Memphis, which specializes in immigration law, in particular work visas, spoke during a seminar at St. Bernards Auditorium on Wednesday.

Susser explained employment-based options for immigrants and non-immigrants.

Susser dispelled what she said were two myths: Aliens come to the United States to take advantage of the public welfare system, and they supply cheap labor to American employers.

In fact, she said, employers hire immigrants because they are "reliable and talented labor."

About half of Arkansas immigrants are undocumented, according to information Susser provided, which was based on data from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

In 2004-05, 51 percent of



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Baltazar Baca, senior attorney with the Office of Special Council in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, discusses the Immigration Nationality Act at an immigration seminar at St. Bernards Auditorium on Wednesday.

immigrants in the state were undocumented, while 29 percent nationally were undocumented.

"In 2000, the employment rate for undocumented men [81 percent] was higher than that for legal immigrant, naturalized citizens or U.S.-born men," according to the Profile of Immigrants in Arkansas.

Susser outlined various types of visas, such as visas for people of extraordinary ability, such as athletes, models, research scientists and entertainers and their entourages; agricultural

workers, used frequently in Arkansas; and visas for immigrants who have a specialty occupation and at least a bachelor's degree.

The latter, with a quota of 65,000 fills on the first day, and in fact 115,000 applied for those slots, she said.

Audience members who were employers told Susser that they were most interested in work visas for employees of farms, construction, lawn and nursery care, engineering and communications.

Gina Gomez, executive director of Hispanic Commu-

nity Services, which sponsored the event, said human resource managers, Arkansas State University faculty and students, educators, social workers, health care professionals and business community leaders were in attendance.

Baltazar Baca, senior attorney with the Office of Special Council in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, discussed the Immigration Nationality Act.

The attorney claimed that the act, behind the Internal Revenue Code, is the most complicated law of any other.

"It's arcane and thick," he said.

He also discussed the I-9 process and form for businesses that have three or more employees, as well as Social Security No Match letters.

Patricia Houlihan, director of Catholic Charities Immigration Services, part of the Diocese of Little Rock, spoke about family-based petitions, violence against women and temporary protected status.

Henry Torres, president of the board of directors of the Hispanic Center, said that although this was the first such seminar held in Jonesboro, officials are hopeful it will be an annual event.

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