

## *Calm returns, but tensions still high*

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### **Body**

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On the surface, everything appeared routine in Riverside yesterday.

Government functioned. Trains rolled. Commerce flowed. It was as though the hundreds of protesters who filled the small downtown on Sunday were never there, rallying for and against a ban on hiring and housing illegal immigrants.

But they were there, shouting and furious, reacting to long-held *tensions* that some say are now changing the fabric of this Burlington County river town of 8,000.

"We didn't think there would be so many angry people," said Luis Ordonez, a landlord and owner of a music and electronics store who marched against the ban.

"I used to think it was just the kids who had that attitude, but to see mothers and elderly people there shouting hatred. They are showing a side that was not there before. It's uncomfortable."

Riverside is one of several towns across the nation that have taken it upon themselves to deal with illegal immigration issues.

Hazleton, Pa., was the first to make headlines when it passed a similar law.

The unease in Riverside over illegal immigration has been growing for several years, especially since an influx of Brazilians five years ago. Emotions rose to the surface last month, after the town council passed an ordinance making it a crime to hire or rent to illegal immigrants. Business owners and landlords can be fined up to \$1,000 for violating the law and can be denied business permits, municipal contracts and grants.

Town officials estimate that 1,500 to 3,500 illegal immigrants live in town. Residents say that they have no problem with legal immigrants, but that the illegal newcomers are a drain on taxpayers and don't contribute to the town coffers.

The Sunday gathering, organized by the National Coalition, was to be a prayer rally aimed at pressuring town officials to reconsider the ban. But as protesters on both sides gathered, shouting and name-calling ensued.

Both sides carried banners representing their causes; a handful carried Confederate flags.

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"We are accustomed to this kind of behavior. We've seen it before," said Maite Arce, a member of the board of the National Coalition of Latino Clergy and Christian Leaders. "It just forces us to focus and bring to light what is happening in these communities, keep the pressure on officials, unite the Latino community, and be consistent through vigils and court action."

Mayor Charles Hilton did not return phone calls for comment yesterday. Last week, he said the rally would not change the council's decision on the ban. But some in town feel a subtle but significant change has taken place.

"This doesn't bode well for the town," said longtime resident Ed Robins, owner of Scott Street Music in town. "I believe in tolerance. Yes, there is a problem, but let's rationally think about what we need to do. It's our responsibility to be tolerant and good neighbors. I don't consider what's going on here neighborly."

Though some say the problem is cultural, others say the main issue is unlawful entry into the country.

"It's new to the news media, but it's not to the people that live here," said Shirley Rossi, a Delanco Realtor who sells houses in Riverside. "There's no objection to people moving in - because they've been doing that for years without problems. But the illegal part is what is creating the uprise."

"If you don't have a green card, get out," said Albert Anicic, a Croatian national who has lived in Riverside for 50 years. "You have no business here."

Police said there hadn't been any violence or harassment complaints reported since the protests. Some business owners in town attribute that to the heavy police presence on the street on Sunday.

Riverside Police Lt. David Jaensch said police from several surrounding towns as well as the Burlington County Sheriff's Department were on patrol. Police were also on standby on the town perimeter. Jaensch said that after police saw the anger and shouting that arose in July during a town meeting at which the ordinance was passed, they knew they had to be ready last weekend.

"We knew that there was a possibility it could be volatile," Jaensch said. "And we even anticipated some retaliatory events afterward, but that, thankfully, didn't happen."

Despite the conflicts, new businesses and new residents still come to Riverside.

Rossi said that she had sold a house in town over the weekend and that yesterday a caller specifically wanted a house in Riverside or the surrounding area.

In October, Bruce Behmke will open Boost Cafe - named after the high-octane caffeine drink originally made in Riverside. Behmke, who chose Riverside for his new business, said it would have a cozy feel.

He hopes to attract the crowd expected to move into high-end condominiums that J.S. Hovnanian is building near the River Line light rail.

"What are we supposed to do, pack up and leave?" Behmke asked as work crews hammered inside the shell of a shop. "Things will be fine."

### Online Response to Riverside Protests

Here's what some readers are saying about the Riverside immigration law protest - and counterprotest - on Philly.com:

I don't understand why this has gotten so out of hand. It is a matter of the law. If protesting is all we have to do to be allowed to break laws, what is next? We do not have an issue with immigration, just illegal immigration. If you are legal, you are welcome. - RW

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Once again, leave it up to the press to paint those calling for tighter immigration controls bigots and Nazis, while portraying those here illegally [as] the proverbial poor, hardworking souls who deserve a chance and do us no harm. - *Steve*

Our country cannot sustain itself as a superpower under the increased weight of illegal immigrants. This will divide and conquer us all. - *Wewillfall*

Illegal immigration: this election year's gay-marriage, anti-flag-burning, anti-abortion hot button issue designed to inflame the populace and draw attention from the real issues, like the systematic dismantling of the Constitution, the stagnation of wages, the cost of healthcare, the overall diminishing standard of living of the middle class, the cost of putting a kid through college, the disenfranchisement of the poor, and the overall mortgaging of our future to support tax cuts for the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans. -*M. Defarge*

Nearly every Brazilian I have seen in Riverside, and I live there, works long hours. Cut them a break will you? - *Riverside Woman*

There is no legal way for these people to immigrate to the United States. That is the problem with our broken immigration system.- *sjy*

These protesters are not even from the town. These organizations get together from Philadelphia and stuff, call the news networks and go up there to make people believe that it is the illegals yelling. No! These people from organizations are putting these rallies up and I am proud to say that the people counterprotested to show the rest of the country that we are not going to take this. - *Rey*

These laws need to be enforced and the punishment for hiring illegal immigrants needs to be severe. This is the land of the free but it is 2006 not 1750. Immigration is a problem - they are taking jobs away from US citizens. - *Matt*

Only a couple rednecks had a Confederate flag. To lump us all together as ignorant like that is racist. Completely racist. - *anonymous*

Hatred in this country will never go away. One group is always going to be someone's target. But illegal entry is illegal. Enter correctly and help this country move forward.- *Bob*

You can't stop market forces. As long as there is a disparity in wealth people will come here and work, immigration laws be damned! - *Dan*

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