

DEAF MEXICANS STUCK TOGETHER: DOC

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Body

With acts of kindness and bravado, the enslaved deaf Mexicans rescued by Queens cops helped one another cope with the brutality of their captivity, a doctor said yesterday.

Many of the Mexicans have told interpreters their alleged masters beat them if they returned to their overcrowded Jackson Heights quarters without selling at least \$ 100 worth of trinkets each day.

So, several of the women said, they would share their earnings with friends in order to avoid being punished, said Dr. Frank Estrada, part of an Elmhurst Hospital Center team that has been treating the immigrants.

"You help each other out," one woman told Estrada. "You make sure the others get back and won't be short."

One immigrant, a well-muscled stocky man weighing about 200 pounds, told Estrada that the bosses wouldn't dare strike him but often went after a slight and frail friend, the doctor said.

"They wouldn't beat him when I was around because I could defend him," Estrada quoted the man as saying. The man added that he often would put himself in harm's way for his friend, Estrada said.

Despite the alleged brutality that the immigrants have suffered, Estrada said, he was impressed by their gentle manner.

"I was not prepared for the way this group touched me. They were very gentle, loving and communal."

Meanwhile, the Immigration and Naturalization Service officially took custody of the 57 Mexicans and promised they would remain in the Westway Hotel in Queens while the investigation of the slave-labor ring continues.

"There are absolutely no plans to remove any of these people from the United States at this time," INS Commissioner Doris Meissner said.

But authorities ducked the question of whether the Mexicans would find themselves in a situation similar to that of the Chinese immigrants from the ill-fated Golden Venture. Sixty of those immigrants were detained for 31/2 years.

Jorge Pinto, consul general at the Mexican Consulate in Manhattan, said some of the Mexicans are considering going home. "They realize they're important for the investigation and they want to cooperate," Pinto said, but he added that some of them want to be reunited with their families.

Seven alleged ring members have been arrested, and authorities continued to search for two key players still at large Jose Reinaldo Paoletti, 59, and his son, Renato, believed to be in his early 20s.

Graphic

Jose Reinaldo Paoletti Renato Paoletti

JON NASO DAILY NEWS MISSING detained mom, 7-year-old Reyna Dianna Guillen-Rodriguez (r.) signs "I love you" in Mexico City.

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