

EXPOSING GREEN CARD CON JOBS

Daily News (New York)

October 19, 2005 Wednesday, SPORTS FINAL EDITION

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Section: SUBURBAN; Pg. 1

Length: 330 words

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Body

FOR MANY immigrants, the annual **green card** lottery is a golden opportunity to achieve the American Dream, but the process of obtaining the enviable visa is rife with scams and misinformation.

So public officials gathered in Corona yesterday to explain the ABCs of the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program and its online application, which can be completed at any Queens public library branch.

"Here in Queens, where we have the most diverse population of any county in America, the [program] is extremely important," said Borough President Helen Marshall.

For many, the opportunity is so compelling that "they pay terrible amounts of money" - as much as \$500 - for someone to submit the free application on their behalf, Marshall said.

"There are always people who want to make a buck on you," she warned.

The Diversity Visa Program grants 55,000 **green cards** to people whose nations account for low or modest numbers of newcomers. The 16 ineligible countries include mainland China, Colombia, Haiti, India, Mexico, Jamaica and Russia.

Applicants must provide a digitized photo and personal information. The deadline is Dec. 4. The lottery is open to all natives of eligible countries - although a change of status is not guaranteed for those staying in the U.S. illegally.

When the federal government adopted an electronic application system three years ago, the move created another hurdle for some low-income immigrants who lack computer access, said city Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Guillermo Linares.

"This is why we approached the library system," he added.

Some 1,000 computers are available in Queens branches, attendants are there to help out, and photos can be taken at the system's two largest locations - the Flushing branch and the Central Library in Jamaica.

To avoid scams, officials advised applicants to register through the state department Web site, to never leave passports or other IDs with service providers and to call 311 if they suspect any fraud.

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Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: PASSPORTS & VISAS (92%); IMMIGRATION (90%); LIBRARIES (89%); PUBLIC LIBRARIES (89%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (78%); CITY GOVERNMENT (77%); FRAUD & FINANCIAL CRIME (77%); LOW INCOME PERSONS (71%)

Industry: LIBRARIES (89%); PUBLIC LIBRARIES (89%)

Geographic: NEW YORK, NY, USA (90%); UNITED STATES (93%); HAITI (79%); INDIA (79%); CHINA (79%)

Load-Date: October 19, 2005