

## Career center for screeners

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**Byline:** Rodney Foo Mercury News

### **Body**

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San Jose officials responded Thursday to the looming layoffs of hundreds of local airport screeners by opening a career center at the airport to help them find new jobs.

More than 360 passenger screeners working at Mineta San Jose International Airport will be replaced in November when the federal government assumes control of security at 429 airports nationwide.

Many of the screeners are immigrants from the Philippines and are ineligible for the new jobs under the fledgling Transportation Security Administration. By law, the screener positions can only be filled by citizens -- a requisite that has come under fire from civil rights and labor groups.

To help the screeners adapt to new jobs, a partnership between the city and other groups has created the center in a small building north of Terminal C. Officials said Thursday it was essential to place the center at the airport to make it easy for workers to visit it before or after their shifts.

The center will provide a range of services from helping immigrant workers file for citizenship -- a federal requirement for hiring -- to assisting in filing for unemployment benefits.

The effort is a cooperation among the city, Silicon Valley Workforce, a program that helps laid-off workers with job training, and the Philip Vera Cruz Justice Project, a group dedicated to protect the rights of Filipino immigrants.

Job training classes and seminars on resume writing and interviewing skills are scheduled. Computers will be available for workers to fill out online applications for the new federal security screening positions under the Transportation Security Administration and for other jobs.

Sebastian Warren, a transportation agency spokesman, said all current airport screeners who meet minimum requirements should apply for the federal airport posts.

"They have the necessary skills to hit the ground running," Warren said.

It is estimated that 700 non-citizens work as screeners at the Bay Area's three major airports. Labor and civil rights groups have protested the citizenship requirement, saying the immigrant workers are being unfairly blamed for the security practices that led to the Sept. 11 attacks.

"I don't think any other job on the airport requires citizenship. . . . It really doesn't make much sense to single out" the screeners and baggage handlers, said Councilman Chuck Reed, who helped to get the jobs center off the ground.

Of the 365 passenger screeners at San Jose airport, 102 are not citizens, according to the city Office of Economic Development.

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Of the 102, 56 have applied for citizenship, an indication that they are considering applying for their old jobs with the new agency.

A job center survey will be included in the screeners paychecks next week, and the answers will be used to refine and shape its services, said Terry Valens of the justice project.

Screeners hoping to land jobs with the new federal agency will find there are different expectations, such as an emphasis on their physical ability to deal with the work, enunciation and facility with English and their problem-solving skills, Valens said.

The San Jose airport program bears a few similarities to another at San Francisco International Airport, which expanded its job listing office in December to include workshops on naturalization for its screeners.

Mercury News Staff Writer Aaron Davis contributed to this report.

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