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The Pueblo Chieftain

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Saturday June 02, 2007

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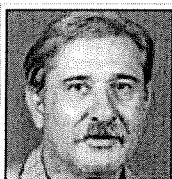
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Teen labor could be a solution to worker shortage



JUAN ESPINOSA

It was the last day of school and surprisingly the topic of conversation was not about summer vacations, camping or visiting amusement parks.

Nobody in my second- and third-hour Chicano studies classes at Centennial High School on the final day of school for the year said anything about sleeping in and being carefree for a few weeks.

On this day, the talk was serious.

"Did you find a job?" was the question of the day. A few students already had jobs. Others had just been hired. But most were anxiously waiting to hear or hoping something would come along.

It was a pleasant surprise to see that this group of teens wanted to work.

I feel lucky to have learned the value of work early on in life. It started on the last day of school when I passed to the eighth-grade.

My dad had asked me to meet him at the Western Auto store in Main Street on Montrose. When I got there, he was looking at bicycles. "Pick one out," he said. After sitting astride a few,

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I settled in on a bright-red model called the Western Flyer. I think it cost \$50.

Next, we walked over to the lawn mower display. "Pick one out," Dad said again.

As we looked over the stock of power mowers, he explained his simple plan. He had arranged for me to buy the bicycle and the mower on credit. The total came to \$95 and I was expected to make \$5 payments until it was paid off.

By the end of the summer, I had started a lawn-mowing service in the neighborhood, paid off the loan and had discovered the magic of cash flow.

Instead of taking me fishing, my dad taught me how to fish - metamorphically speaking.

Back to this year's bumper crop of young people just hitting the job market for the first time. I wish them the best of luck because working for one's own money is literally a rewarding experience.

It also occupies a person's time, burns off energy and reduces one's chances of getting into trouble. It doesn't take a social scientist to understand that teens with money in their pockets are less likely to shoplift or steal.

In recent months, there has been talk of a labor shortage in the state. Particularly in seasonal work traditionally performed by immigrant labor. A pilot program with the Colorado Department of Corrections has a crew of female inmates working on a few farms on the St. Charles Mesa, but it is unlikely the experimental program will fill the need.

So here's the deal, as I see it. We have a glut of workers just entering the job market and we have a shortage of workers in the area of hard, manual labor jobs. For many of today's teens, farm labor may not be what they had in mind, but hey, you've got to start somewhere.

Also, there are other seasonal jobs in construction, at tourist attractions, and restaurants.

Employers, if you have a job vacancy and can't find a job-ready worker, why not give a young worker a chance to get some experience and learn some skills? It could be just the opportunity to prime the pump of a productive life.

Young workers, if you can't find an easy job that pays tons of cash, maybe you'll have to start somewhere else. An unemployed worker is not in a good position to turn a nose up to any job.

Juan Espinosa, a Chieftain night city editor who just finished

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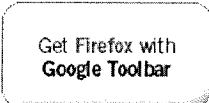
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