

**Community and Shelter Assistance (CASA of Oregon): Improving the Quality of Life of Farmworkers throughout the State**

By Peter Hainley, Executive Director, CASA of Oregon

For the last 15 years, CASA of Oregon has been developing housing and related facilities for farmworkers throughout Oregon. CASA of Oregon concentrates its development activities in areas with a significant farmworker population. Its goal has been to ensure that farmworkers and their families have decent, safe and affordable housing. CASA of Oregon is committed to promoting self-sufficiency among the farmworker population in an effort to improve their quality of life and the quality of rural communities throughout Oregon.



CASA of Oregon also works with local community groups such as El Centro Cultural in Cornelius. CASA of Oregon and El Centro have worked together and with other local farmworker housing and service groups from the late 80's to ensure farmworkers had the opportunity for housing and related services. Since that time El Centro, and the programs they offer have grown and changed to accommodate the evolving needs of farmworkers.

In 1998, additional space was needed for El Centro's expanding services, such as English as a Second Language (ESL), Drivers Education, and Adelante Mujeres. CASA of Oregon had the opportunity to provide development services for that first expansion project. In the intervening years, CASA of Oregon and El Centro's paths continued to cross as El Centro's ever-burgeoning services required additional space to serve the Latino population. Today's technological world has El Centro's computer literacy classes filled to capacity. The demand for these classes along with ESL and Spanish as a Second Language (SSL) are but a few of the examples of El Centro's current expansion project. The additional classrooms will allow for more classes in a comfortable and appropriate setting.

CASA of Oregon assisted in the purchase of an adjoining parcel and worked with other members of the development team to ensure the project came to fruition. CASA of Oregon and El Centro also worked on advocacy issues in the 1999 legislature that resulted in huge gains for the farmworker population in regards to housing. Without the dedication and leadership of El Centro board and staff, these things never would have been accomplished.

We are pleased to be a partner in development with El Centro and look forward to future opportunities where our commitment to the farmworker population complements El Centro's mission to promote social and economic development among the diverse communities in Washington County. Together, as advocates for some of the poorest residents of our communities, we will make a difference.