

Friday, April 23, 2010

West Plano

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Immigrants benefit from free attorney services at workshop

By SAEROM YOO
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Jose Zapopan, 19, of Irving spoke on behalf of his Mexico-native mother, Amaya, at the Citizenship Information Workshop in Plano on April 17.

He said though his mother has lived in the U.S. for almost two decades, English is still a big obstacle for her — and will continue to be when she applies for citizenship. “She’s studying hard but still her English isn’t very strong,” he said.

The Zapopans were a couple of about 150 who attended the free event hosted by Plano’s Multi-Cultural Outreach Roundtable. While many, like the Zapopans, were looking for help in the immigration process in their native language, others consulted immigration attorneys without fear of legal fees.

More than 40,000 foreign citizens live in Plano, making up about 15.5 percent of the

population, said Stephen Sims, senior planner for the city of Plano. In Collin County, Sims said, more than 83,000 make up about 11 percent of the population.

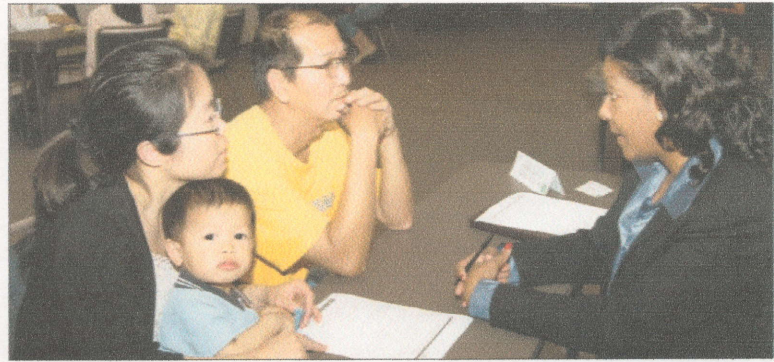
“People really appreciate this opportunity to get free services from attorneys,” said Jian Li, co-chairwoman of MCOR. “Otherwise they have to pay hundreds of dollars.”

Ruben Martinez of Plano was an example.

“It’s good because we don’t have enough money to spend to go get information,” he said.

Not only that, he said he was assured that the information he got at the workshop was reliable.

The workshop consisted of lectures from a USCIS supervisor, an FBI agent and an immigration attorney to talk about general information and requirements of the immigration process. Seven volunteer multilingual attorneys also were available for specific



Immigration lawyer Irrekka Clark (right) gives legal advice to Garland residents Tony Huynh and Meifang Dieng.

ic questions on attendees’ applications and situations.

Noaman Azhar, an immigration attorney who speaks Urdu, volunteered at the workshop for the second time Saturday.

He said many immigrants assume their English isn’t good enough to apply for citizenship, but they don’t know that a basic knowledge of the language is all that is required. This is the type of information, he said, immigrants are glad to be able to get for free.

Khatina Wahab of McKinney, who coordinated the event, said feedback has been overwhelming.

“I’m still getting phone calls,” she said. “They want to know when the next workshop is.”

Wahab said the event’s success has given MCOR and its services exposure.



“At least now they know there’s a body working for them,” she said.

Saerom Yoo is a neighborsgo editor. She can be reached at 469-330-5685.

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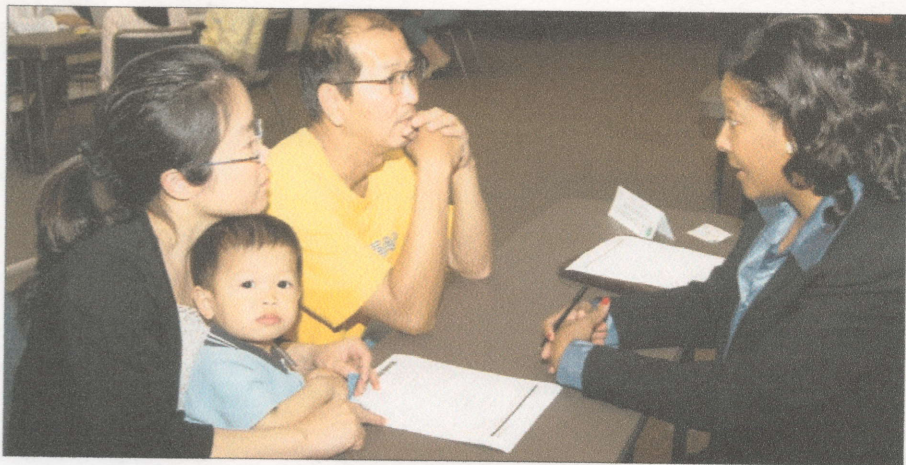
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Immigration lawyer Irrekka Clark (right) gives legal advice to Garland residents Tony Huynh and Meifang Dieng.

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