

Program gives seasonal workers some wheels

KARENA WALTER
Postmedia Network

A new program to help some of Niagara's hundreds of seasonal workers get around is putting the cycle in recycle.

The Bikes for Farmworkers program launched Sunday with 30 donated bicycles on loan to workers at St. Alban's Anglican Church.

"Somewhere in a garage is a bicycle that's been sitting for five years and hasn't been ridden," said Michael Hahn, an organizer of the program.

"Here, we have Mexican workers who need bikes."

Donations of bicycles to St. Alban's are fixed up and go through a 45-point inspection by volunteer Dave Coles, outfitted with locks and lights and identified with a small orange sticker. Farmworkers can borrow a bike indefinitely with a \$10 deposit, which they get back when they return the bike.

"For them, it's transportation,"

Hahn said. "It's a way off the farm."

He estimated there are 2,000 to 3,000 temporary farm workers in the Niagara area.

Because St. Alban's reverend is Spanish speaking, it has attracted a number of farmworkers and the church now buses them to its Ontario St. location for a Spanish-language service.

"It allows them to engage with others and have a sense of community," Hahn said.

Rev. Javier Arias said there are 400 to 600 seasonal workers in the Beamsville, Vineland and Jordan area who come from Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras. He estimated 60 to 100 attend the Spanish Sunday service, but many others can't come because they work.

The church also offers ESL and health programs, in which it transports workers who want to see a Spanish-speaking doctor to St. Catharines once a week in the evening.

Arias said workers from Mexico



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Seasonal agricultural workers choose bikes to borrow from St. Alban's Anglican Church in Beamsville on Sunday. A new program at the church takes in donated bikes, fixes them up and loans them out indefinitely to farmworkers for \$10. Left to right: Maribel Gonzales, Alejandra Rebolledo, Rosalba Garrido and Rosa Herrera.

live in the area six to eight months every year, while those from Hon-

duras or Guatemala could be here for up to 24 months. They need bicycles.

"We're looking for good people to be generous with the workers. That's the only transportation they have. If they take a cab it costs money," Arias said.

Mexican worker Alejandra Rebolledo was one of 15 people picking up bikes at the church Sunday. With Arias translating, she said she would use it in the evening to buy food and groceries. Sometimes she'll use it after work for exercise too, she said.

She said she's worked on a farm in Beamsville for 15 years so she can have a better job and make more money for her family than in Mexico.

Coles said anyone who wants to donate a bike can drop it off at St. Alban's Anglican Church at 4341 Ontario St. Beamsville. Donors can also contact St. Alban's at 905-563-4518 and arrange for a volunteer to pick it up if it's in the area.

karena.walter@sunmedia.ca