



PHOTOS BY SPECIAL TO THE NEWS-PRESS

Kelly Kirschner, director of UnidosNow.org in Sarasota, spoke about immigrant workers and their roles in supporting Florida's agriculture industry at the European American Network luncheon Tuesday at the Bonita Bay Club.

# Migrant workers play a far-reaching productive role in Florida economy

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Think you want tougher immigration laws?

Existing laws already hold back tourists coming to spend millions here, business owners and workers willing to take jobs that many Americans don't want.

That was the discussion Tuesday among Southwest Florida immigration experts who discussed the impact tourists, foreign investors and immigrant workers have on the local business community. They spoke to about 35 people who turned out for an event put on by the European American Network at the Bonita Bay Club.

While the U.S. has special agreements with some countries for tourism, tourists from many other countries such as China or Brazil need to apply for visas to vacation in the U.S., said Norma Henning, an immigration attorney with Salvatori Wood & Buckel in Naples.

"Those are countries that have a much more affluent population now, they want to spend money on tourism, and they would like to come to the United States if we

would only make it a little easier for them," Henning said.

Tourism is a huge industry in the U.S. bringing in \$1.8 trillion in revenue and \$118 billion in taxes annually, she said.

Some tourists buy homes in the U.S. and stay for longer periods of time, which increases the tourist dollars spent, she said.

Kelly Kirschner, another speaker at the event and director of UnidosNow, said the broad use of E-Verify, adopted by states such as Arizona and Alabama to check workers' legal status, could prove disastrous to Florida.

The state ranks third in the U.S. for agriculture production and supplies 40 percent of the world's orange juice, he said.

And undocumented immigrants spend \$15,000 or more a year, according to a Florida International University study Kirschner referenced.

And when immigrants shop, they pay sales tax. When they buy gas, they pay gas taxes. Even when they rent, those payments are often used by the owners to pay their property taxes.

"Whether you're documented or undocumented you're paying those taxes," Kirschner said.

Bruce E. Sands, an attorney

## BY THE NUMBERS

Foreign citizens issued a non-immigrant visa by category (nationwide):

### E2 Treaty investor visa

- 29,453 in 2006
- 29,298 in 2007
- 28,588 in 2008
- 24,033 in 2009
- 25,500 in 2010

### Non-immigrant H1B temporary worker visa

- 135,421 in 2006
- 154,053 in 2007
- 129,464 in 2008
- 110,367 in 2009
- 117,409 in 2010

### L1 Intracompany transferee visa for executive, managerial, and specialized personnel continuing employment with an international firm or corporation

- 72,613 in 2006
- 84,532 in 2007
- 84,078 in 2008
- 64,696 in 2009
- 74,719 in 2010

— Source: Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State

with Henderson-Franklin in Fort Myers, said there's a disconnect between perception and reality when it comes to migrant work-

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