

cindy rodríguez | staff columnist

Try "A Day Without a Latino" By Cindy Rodríguez

Denver Post Staff Columnist

DenverPost.com Article Last Updated: 04/09/2006 03:04:33 AM MDT

http://www.denverpost.com/rodriguez/ci_3672721

Head chef Romulo Risindic peered from the kitchen into the dining area. He had six cooks for just 20 patrons, a job one of his men could do alone.

So that morning, Risindic, who oversees the kitchen, did something he had never done in his nine years at Zaidy's Deli: He left for 1½ hours and took three cooks with him.

He told the manager they were needed at a rally. Still wearing their white uniforms, they rode the 16th Street Mall shuttle, and when they stepped out at Civic Center Station, they marveled at the crush of protesters.

"I was surprised to see how many people showed up," Risindic said of the March 25 rally. "We Latinos are timid people, and sometimes we think we should keep our heads down."

Denver police put the count at 50,000 people, but Civic Center can hold 100,000 people, and the plaza was overflowing. The crowd had to be closer to 100,000.

All kinds of people were there. Among them were people like Risindic, a Mexican-born immigrant who became an American citizen years ago. He and the cooks who work under him are all documented, but they support those who came to the U.S. to work.

Imagine what would happen if every Latino immigrant in Colorado - documented and undocumented - decided to strike for a day? The state would come to a halt.

That's exactly what organizers are considering doing nationally May 1. They are tentatively calling it "A Day Without a Latino." It would prove to disbelieving Americans what would happen if even a quarter of Latinos in the U.S. didn't go to work that Monday.

Gerard Rudofsky, the owner of the two Zaidy's Delis, in Cherry Creek and downtown, can't imagine trying to run his business without immigrant workers. His restaurant may serve Jewish specialties like kugel, challah French toast and matzo ball soup, but the cooks are from Mexico. So are the dishwashers and busboys.

"People say they are depressing wages. That's not true. My people are getting big wages," Rudofsky said. "Some of my cooks make \$18, \$20 an hour."

It's just that other workers, he says, don't work as hard and are not as loyal. "I hate to say it, but a lot of our people are lazy," Rudofsky said. "The work ethic isn't there. They call in and say 'I have a headache. I'm not coming in to work today.'"

Yet his Mexican-born workers don't call in sick. Rudofsky said he knows many people in the restaurant business; they all say the same thing. "As far as workers go, they are the best," he said.

Risindic agrees. He says work is a source of pride. In his nine years working at Zaidy's, he has not missed one day.

"I don't see the point in calling in sick," Risindic said. "Staying in bed is not going to make me feel better. I'd rather work than be bored at home."

But if organizers call on Latinos to miss a day of work - a worker's strike, if you will - to prove that undocumented workers are essential to the labor force, he just might.

Rudofsky says he would understand.

Cindy Rodríguez's column appears Tuesdays in Scene and Sundays in Style. Contact her at 303-820-1211 or crodriquez@denverpost.com.