



NAPA VINEYARD WORKERS AIM HIGH

By Steve Moulds, Moulds Family Vineyards and NVG Board of Directors

I had quite an experience last week. I witnessed 165 men and women from this Valley sit in a large room over 2 days, getting challenged to be all they could be. No, this was not some self-actualization scam by the Guru de jour. This workshop involved the vineyard workers we drive by daily but rarely get a chance to meet personally.

The Farmworker Education Workshop was put on by the Napa Valley Grapegrowers for the fieldworkers and supervisors from all over the Valley. The event has grown over its 4 year history and now is sponsored by a special fundraiser, dedicated to this one purpose: ensuring that we continue to have the best agricultural workforce in the country.

The sessions themselves were educational, thought provoking, and in some ways, challenging. Topics ranged from "How to Function in a Teamwork Environment" to "Mathematical Calculations in the Vineyard". The California Highway Patrol held a lively discussion about the nuances of driving tractors and trucks on public roads and the different licenses required. Of course, there were updates on current pest and disease challenges, but that information was balanced with topics like "Agriculture in the New Economy". A more technical discussion of "Fertilization and Nutrition for Vineyards" was followed by "Viticultural Practices in Difficult Situations".

Agriculture has been an economic and cultural mainstay for millennia. Science and technology are creating constant modifications, most for the better. One cultural change, however, is the immigration morass in which we find ourselves, with heightened border security such a topic for discussion it is not surprising that the annual ebb and flow of workers has diminished. We have a more permanent work force who have the opportunity, if not the need, to integrate more fully into the community at large.

This thought was framed beautifully for me by one of the 1st day speakers, Arnulfo Solorio of Silverado Farming Company, who spoke about "How to be Successful in the Winegrape Industry of Napa Valley". He was accompanied by Juan Cardenas of Nord Family Vineyards in relating experiences from his life that challenged him, and ultimately allowed him to rise in positions of responsibility. Mr. Solorio's deeply

personal account captured all the attendees. I could see people taking notes furiously. His message was clear. It had taken him a while to learn, but he did. No matter what you do, find a way to do it better, and at every junction, find a way to add value to your employer. The basic stepping stone was to learn English. Long days, nights, weekends, whatever it takes, learn English. Not just to buy groceries or get by, but to fully contribute to your community, as well as your employer.

That night I got a call from Roberto, our own highly valued employee. He requested a meeting with my wife and me to talk about how he could improve his work for us.

The next day, on his own initiative, he enrolled in English classes.