many young single men from the states of Chihuahua and Durango Mexico, and also many Chicano families from the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. The life of the migrant families is especially difficult because they leave everything behind in hopes of bettering their economic situation, with no guarantee that things will actually improve. Even the families who do not work with *contratistas* and work directly with the grower are not truly independent. In general, workers have very little control over their wages and living conditions.

Frustrations with Wages and Housing

Most of the organizing work involved *taileres*, or house meetings, with the workers to establish a core membership in the cooperative and put forward the alternatives in the labor system. During house meetings Cristina and Rosi heard many stories about the workers frustrations with their wages and housing. Many families aren't told how much they are going to be paid before the harvest, which allows the prices to be manipulated. Most do not receive social security or workman's compensation if they are hurt or unemployed.

The meetings are designed so that different people can share their experiences and learn that they are not alone. Many of the workers are easily exploited because they only work for the season and can easily be fired and replaced if they protest. The cooperative is extremely important because the workers are their own employers, and they oversee all the negotiations. These people, contrary to many stereotypes of migrant farmworkers, are very knowledgeable about their oppression and exploitation, and they want to change their situation.

The first step in changing this situation is the cooperative's first harvesting contract scheduled for September. This contract is crucial on several levels. Not only will control of the workplace and higher wages be experienced by a constituency of workers, but it will also show the credibility of the cooperative to growers in order to secure more contracts.

These contracts will generate more work and money for the development of the cooperative and its long range goals. Some of those include purchasing apartments for workers, establishing a daycare run by the workers, and establishing a credit union for the workers.

On Sunday July 7, the interns celebrated the inauguration of the contract with *Menudo* — a traditional Mexican food; and music — cumbias and salsas. About forty workers and their families attended. The *Menudo*, with all its wonderful spices, was made by Elva Lopez who is the president of the cooperative. The music was provided courtesy of Rosi's Latin Sounds (her boom box and the local Spanish station). The highlight of the campaign for Cristina was organizing the yard sale where she went delirious with pleasure over all the used clothes. She bought over half of the stock, claiming she did not have any clothes because she was supposed to travel light for her placement. The money raised was used to buy equipment for the tools that are needed to harvest the onion crop.

More than anything, the six weeks in Colorado were a huge learning experience not only in terms of organizing, but also on a cultural and lifestyle level. Cristina and Rosi have come out of Manzanola not just with organizing skills, but also with a whole new vocabulary and a sense of a different cultural mode. It is all proof of their adaptability. If they can organize in Manzanola, say the two interns, they can organize anywhere.

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MAAP FIELD REPORTS: Portland, Oregon

R E S P E C T

Find out what it means to me

The Interns
Rahdi Taylor
Nicole Cuadra
Gail Yamauchi

The Campaign
Organizing Hotel Workers

Most Memorable Experience
"There was a woman who was so afraid of wearing the RESPECT button because she worked alone who came out at the end of the day and said 'of course I wore that button!'"

"In Viet Nam, we are not like wasteful Americans. We are poor people and we conserve what resources we have." Thi Nguyen is a refugee from Viet Nam. She worked cleaning rooms at a hotel in downtown Portland, Oregon. When she found a shirt tossed in a guest room garbage can, she took it home for her brother. Management found out and accused her of stealing. Thi was furious and hurt, and quit.

Like Thi, May Chan, a Chinese immigrant, was accused of stealing when she took something from the garbage in a guest room. Management fired her.

Ramon Vasquez, a Mexican laundry worker, interpreted between managers and other Latino workers, always making sure the perspective of the workers was heard. A manager told him his people were "animals." Ramon no longer serves as an interpreter. It is this kind of basic lack of respect that workers in Portland hotels confront.

The tourism industry is crucial to Portland's economy. But only two of the major hotels (with five percent of the workforce) have representation by the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (H.E.R.E.) union. MAAP interns Rahdi Taylor, Nicole Cuadra and Gail Yamauchi spent the summer with H.E.R.E. Local 9 and Peter Cervantes-Gautschi of the International Union to initiate a campaign to transform and strengthen the position of Portland's hotel workers.

Since 95 percent of Portland's hotels are non-union, the position of all hotel workers is very poor. The city's two union hotels, the Hilton and the Benson, feel little pressure to pay room cleaners much more than minimum wage or to assign reasonable workloads. No other hotel in town is treating workers with respect, so why should they?

The interns and their site leaders show off the "RESPECT" buttons and flyers they used to build pride in Portland's hotel workforce.

To respond to this situation, H.E.R.E. has started the Portland Workers' Project. The Project will strengthen the union in two ways — by unifying workers already in H.E.R.E., and by spreading the union to Portland's other hotels. The interns made contacts with housekeepers in the non-union hotels with the aim of creating a city-wide committee which will go on to organize all of Portland's hotel workers. When non-union workers see that the existing