

Local

California
avoids major
quake damage

5B

Legislature
prepares
for cuts

4B

DAILY COMICS IN COLOR | 8B

NBC CANCELS LENO'S PRIME-TIME SHOW | 6B

Guide aids immigrants in U.S.

By Erica Meltzer
Camera Staff Writer

Locals wrote 'What Every Immigrant Needs to Know'

On the Web

The Boulder-based nonprofit group Intercambio de Comunidades aims to help immigrants integrate into their new communities.

Offering English classes is part of that, but the differences between Mexico or Peru and the United States go far be-

yond language.

So when Lee Shainis, the group's founder and executive director, went looking for resources, he mostly found thick tomes on immigration law or thin pamphlets that barely pierced the surface.

"I didn't find anything was

comprehensive, understandable and affordable," he said.

Starting in 2008, Shainis sat down with former students who had become friends — immigrants who had years of experience living in the United States and could tell him what they wish they had known

when they came — to come up with his own guide to living in the United States.

The result is "What Every Immigrant Needs to Know: Practical Information for Living and Succeeding in the United States."

The 43-page booklet covers

To see sample pages of "What Every Immigrant Needs to Know," visit www.livingintheus.org.

everything from the U.S. postal system and the do-not-call

See GUIDE, 2B

Guide written for immigrants

Continued from 1B

list to parent-teacher conferences and the temptations of junk food.

Since the first edition came out in early 2009, Intercambio has distributed more than 6,000 copies of the guide in 12 states. The guide has been bought for distribution by health clinics, human relations commissions and social service organizations. The Denver Public Library ordered 1,000 copies.

"It's encouraging that so many people find it useful," Shainis said.

Jose Ociel Guzman helped with the preparation of the guide. He said immigrants have to adjust to many differences.

Some are personal. Compared to Mexicans, Americans can seem more rushed and isolated, he said. Not being aware of others can have serious consequences. Traffic signs and laws are different — and enforced.

"In Mexico, a lot of people drive without a license or insurance," he said. "There aren't a lot of police around, and if you do get stopped, you just give them money and it's OK. Here, it's not like that."

Intercambio also has developed a two-hour workshop based on the book. Students practice finding information in

Tips for new immigrants

A few examples of the 170 tips included in "What Every Immigrant Needs to Know":

When you meet someone for the first time, you typically make eye contact, shake hands and say "nice to meet you." Some people will just give a nod and a smile instead of a handshake. Introductions are often casual and unaffected by a person's age or status.

Humor often takes time for immigrants to understand. Humor is a common way to start conversations or to relax situations. Sarcasm is also common, where people say the opposite of what they really mean.

When you call a business or government agency, it is common to immediately hear a voice recording that greets you with a list of options. To reach specific people, you may need to first listen to a recorded menu and then dial the extension. You should get used to the automated menus and not just hang up when you hear one.

In some countries, people use their car horns frequently, but in the U.S., honking is only used when necessary, especially in smaller cities.

Avoid pointing at people. Make sure you know the meanings of different hand gestures which vary from country to country.

Many immigrants are surprised by the amount of interaction expected of them during English classes or other classes they attend. The teaching style in the U.S. is changing, and adult and young students are expected to ask questions, be vocal and work in pairs.

the book and role-play various scenarios, such as an interaction between two people with very different cultural ideas of personal space and how to take advantage of a parent-teacher conference.

Megan Leuthold, a literacy teacher at Lafayette Elementary, said the school invited Intercambio after doing interviews with all the Spanish-speaking families, who make up about 10 percent of the student body there, on how the school might help them more.

After each role-playing exer-

cise, the participants would dissect the interaction and discuss why it was uncomfortable or what went wrong.

Leuthold said that, as a teacher, it can be difficult to get information from immigrant parents about their children. They are very respectful, she said, but sometimes so respectful that the teacher doesn't get the interaction she's looking for.

She said she was impressed at how comfortable the workshop participants were and how everyone was participat-

ing at the end.

Rita Nevarez, of Lafayette, who attended the workshop at the elementary school, said Mexican schoolteachers don't expect — or necessarily want — parents to be so involved.

While language was the biggest challenge when she first came to the U.S. from her native Mexico, there were plenty of other differences, she said, including the school system and the medical system.

She said the workshop was helpful, even though she's now lived in the United States for 13 years.

"It was really good for orienting yourself to the differences in life here," she said in Spanish. "Sometimes I still don't know where to go for information. They showed you how to look things up, where to go."

Felipe Arredondo, of Boulder, who also helped with the book, said new arrivals don't always know the opportunities that are open to them here. He said people don't realize they can get a bank loan here to study or start a business, and they don't know about credit cards and the importance of establishing a credit history.

But the book has good information for people who have been here a long time, as well, he said.

"It's for everyone," he said in Spanish. "I want to give it to the whole world."