

The Record

Local landscapers push for more work visas

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STAFF WRITER

Mark Borst headed for Washington, D.C., last week, hoping to boost the flow of labor back and forth across the Mexican border.

The president of Allendale-based Borst Landscape and Design Inc. was among 500 American businessmen lobbying their congressional representatives to increase the number of temporary work visas, known as H-2Bs, issued by the U.S. each year.

The visas allow businesses such as landscapers, house painters, construction companies and restaurants to legally bring foreign workers into the U.S. for nine months, after which they return home.

Around North Jersey, most H-2B holders are Hispanic. Borst and other landscapers say the workers are essential because American workers won't take landscaping jobs.

Federal law allows immigration authorities to issue only 66,000 H-2B visas a year, which landscapers say is too few to give them the foreign labor they need. Congress effectively increased that number in 2005 by allowing past H-2B holders to get a visa again outside of the restriction of the 66,000-visa cap.

But the clause expired at the end of the federal fiscal year, on Sept. 30. Landscapers and other businesses have been trying ever since to convince Congress to restore the clause.

Landscapers say that if the number of visas isn't increased before the congressional Christmas break in two weeks, they won't be able to process the paperwork needed to bring in foreign workers for the spring start of the landscaping season,

To that end, Borst left his business at 4 p.m. Tuesday, climbed into his Land Rover and drove to Washington with Waldwick landscaper Chris James.

The two men and a dozen other New Jersey businessmen spent Wednesday meeting staffers for the state's 13 congressmen and two senators.

One congressman, Rep. Scott Garrett, R-Wantage, met them in person.

Borst and another landscaper, Miles Kuperus of Sussex, said the congressmen's response was generally supportive. But the landscapers know they are hoeing a tough row, especially given the bitter immigration battle in Congress earlier this year.

Borst, 38, said that if the clause is not extended, "it's going to devastate my business."

He said about 50 of his 75 employees are foreign workers on H-2B visas. "It's a very large portion of the company," he said.

Glenn Jacobsen, owner of Midland Park-based Jacobsen Landscape Design and Construction Inc., said he would be in serious difficulty without the 25 H-2Bs – who hail from Ecuador, Mexico and Costa Rica -- on his staff of 80.

"There could be a decline in business," said Jacobsen, who also went to Washington. He said he might have to turn away work and "reduce some of our support staff, which are American workers."

- A Princeton supplier of cathode ray tubes and monitors has accused a dozen of the world's top glass-tube manufacturers of antitrust activities.

The suit filed by Princeton Display Technologies Inc. accuses Secaucus-based Panasonic Corp. of North America and others of conspiring to illegally set the price of cathode ray tubes.

The parent of Englewood Cliffs-based LG Electronics USA also is named as a defendant in the lawsuit, which was filed Nov. 29 in U.S. District Court in Newark.

The suit follows news reports in recent weeks that European authorities are investigating Amsterdam-based Royal Philips Electronics NV and other companies in the glass-tube display industry for possible antitrust activities. Japan's Fair Trade Commission also is reportedly looking into antitrust activities in the Japanese, South Korean and Taiwanese markets, the suit says.

Princeton Display, founded in 1988, supplies cathode ray tubes (CRTs) that range in size from a half-inch to 21 inches. They are used in automated teller machines and in military, industrial and medical equipment.

The suit says the company "paid higher prices for CRT products than it would have paid absent the conspiracy." The suit, which was filed as a class action, accuses the companies of fixing prices and allocating markets and customers in violation of U.S. antitrust laws.

Panasonic and LG Electronics USA did not return a request for comment.

As the global economy reshapes the way New Jersey companies do business, this weekly column explores the growing ties between Garden State businesses and the rest of the world.

Have any news or comments for Going Global? Contact Hugh R. Morley at 201-646-4318. You may also e-mail morley@northjersey.com.

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