

March 13, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Relief Fund Launched by Mass. Immigrant and Refugee
Advocacy Coalition, Community Foundation**

Niños Fund to benefit Families impacted by Michael Bianco Raid

A relief fund with more than \$65,000 in gifts committed to date has been established at the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts (CFSEMA) in partnership with to the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA).

The **New Bedford Immigrant Families/Niños Fund** was established by the statewide MIRA coalition to help meet the basic needs of the families impacted by the March 6 federal raid on the Michael Bianco manufacturing plant in New Bedford's South End. Within a week, agencies that are working with the families will be able to provide assistance from the Niños Fund to meet those families' basic needs, including housing, utilities, food, medication and some transportation.

Donations have been pouring in from around the country since the fund was launched by MIRA last week, some from as far afield as Chicago and Seattle. A leadership gift has been committed by La Vida, a Lynn-based organization that serves the Guatemalan community. Gifts have also been made by other Boston-based corporations and, locally, a gift was committed this morning by BankFive.

“The needs are so great that we hope to raise at least \$250,000 through this fund to help meet them,” said CFSEMA President Craig J. Dutra. “None of the donations to this fund will be used for overhead costs or salaries. In short, **100 percent** of all donations will be used to directly assist the children and their families with basic needs.”

“Many of the families have expressed concern that without a steady income, they’ll have housing and other financial problems over the next month,” he added.

Donations to the Niños Fund can be sent to CFSEMA at 227 Union Street, Suite 609, New Bedford, MA 02740, or made online through the MIRA website, www.miracoalition.org.

The Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, representing over 100 community and service organizations across the state, has been working to aid the affected children and families, in collaboration with and in support of a number of New Bedford community organizations and churches including but not limited to the Community Economic Development Center, the Immigrant Assistance Center, Maya K'iche, Cosdesal, Immigration Pastoral Center, United Interfaith Action, Catholic Social Services, Community Connections Coalition, Central Labor Council, Southcoast Legal Services, UMASS Dartmouth Labor Extension, Our Lady of Guadalupe at Saint James Church, and other groups and individuals.

Many of these organizations are staffing a relief center set up at the former Our Lady of Guadalupe Convent at 2 Acushnet Avenue.

Last week, the federal government rounded up 361 illegal immigrants who worked at the Bianco factory – mainly mothers with young children, leaving children behind at schools and day care centers. While some detainees were released for “humanitarian reasons” – mostly because they are the sole support for minor children – others were sent to detention centers in Texas. Still others are being held in Massachusetts and Rhode Island facilities, including the Bristol County and Barnstable Houses of Correction.

About the Community Foundation

Since 1995, area residents have been turning to the Community Foundation of Southeastern Massachusetts to make their philanthropic giving as effective as possible. CFSEMA is a public charity serving thousands of people who share a common concern – improving the quality of life in Southeastern Massachusetts.

To date, the Community Foundation has assets of more than \$16 million and has distributed over \$4.8 million from 84 funds to humanitarian, educational and cultural organizations in the region. More information about the Foundation can be found at www.cfsema.org.

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