



NIC COURTY

Open Invitation: "When you go from protest to politics, that's where our organization is ready and waiting," says COPA volunteer Vivienne Moore (left).

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Coalition of faith and community groups seeks 30,000 signatures for political agenda.

BY SARA RUBIN

Juan Uranga remembers a dilapidated R.V. park in Watsonville that was slated for demolition, even though farm workers and their families lived there.

"The units were in awful condition," says Uranga, executive director of the Center for Community Advocacy.

The usual cadre of farm-worker advocates spoke up to support renovations, but it was voices of religious leaders that Uranga believes tipped the County Board of

Supervisors in their favor. "I'm not sure the county would've approved it [otherwise]," he says.

In 2005, the park was transformed into low-income housing called Villas del Paraiso, thanks to the efforts of Communities Organized for Relational Power in Action.

COPA is the local arm of the national Industrial Areas Foundation, launched in 1940 by legendary Chicago organizer Saul Alinsky. COPA formed in 2003 to

bring his tactics to Monterey and Santa Cruz counties, and today represents 24 institutions, mostly churches.

Peter Stemp, ministry outreach coordinator at the Diocese of Monterey, is helping collect signatures for COPA's Stand Up and Take Charge Campaign, launched March 12. They're 200 signatures toward an October goal of 30,000, in support of a broad agenda: the rights to affordable housing, health-care, safety, economic opportunity and education for citi-

zens and immigrants alike.

"Voting once every four years isn't really a full range of activity in democracy. This is about making our democracy work," says Vivienne Moore, a COPA volunteer and parishioner at St. Angela Merici in Pacific Grove.

Moore hopes the petition sparks continued conversation about COPA's agenda.

"There are no surprises, no gotchas," she says. "It's all about working together. There's no blame here." ☒