

# In Gastonia they do not arrest people for minor crimes



In an effort to listen to the concerns of Latinos, various officers of the Gastonia Police Department, such as Alvaro Jaimes, maintain frequent dialogue with members of the community. Officer Jaimes believes that it is important that all sectors of society are able to trust the police. In this photo an officer in uniform interacts with siblings Edgar and Arely Hernández during an April 18 event at the Mexican Consulate, organized in conjunction with the police department.

*Rosario Machicao*

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According to Officer Nancy Capistrán, the Gastonia Police Department's policy is not to arrest people for minor traffic crimes, instead giving a citation or a ticket to those who do not have a driver's license, as long as they present their consular identity card or a passport.

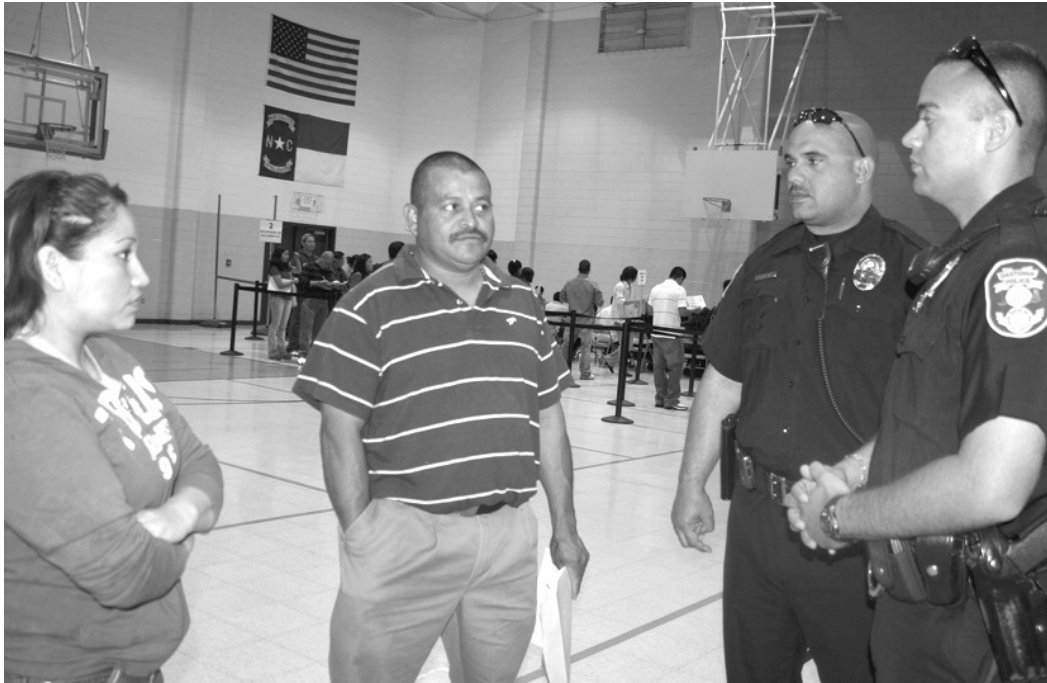
For four years, the Gastonia Police Department has collaborated with the mobile Mexican consulate offices that arrive from Raleigh to their city. Officer Nancy Capistrán affirms that there is a good relationship between the police force and the Latino community.

“Four years ago, the Chief of Police accepted the consular ID as a valid form of identification issued by the Mexican government,” said Officer Capistrán. “If a person doesn’t have a driver’s license but presents their consular registration to the Gastonia police, this document can be used to give them

department is able to communicate with the Latino community,” said Officer Capistrán.

“We are accepting applications and offer an additional bonus for officers who speak another language, especially Spanish,” said the officer who investigates gang activity in the city.

She also commented to La Noticia that the department has started an outreach program to strengthen relations with the Latino community, which offers monthly talks in Spanish on different topics.



*Paulo Quiróz and Rocío Veloz, attendees of the mobile Mexican consulate, speak with police officers Lázaro Creag (left) and Alvaro Jaimes (right) about difficulties that the Latino community faces due to lack of driver’s license.*

a court citation or a ticket; they will not be arrested, because this is a minor crime.”

If a person does not have identification – whether immigrant or American – they can be sent to jail. “It’s there that Program 287(g) is applied to immigrants, as the country sheriff has authority there.”

#### **Bilingual police**

In the mobile Mexican consulate, three of Gastonia Police Department’s four bilingual police officers were present: Officer Capistrán, from Chicago, Officer Lázaro Creag, who worked in Florida, and Officer Alvaro Jaimes, of New York.

“We are 168 officers total. At least one bilingual officer is on duty at all times to provide support so that our

“We talk to them about safety, immigration. On two occasions, Rubén Campillo of the Latin American Coalition spoke to them about what to do in case of a raid. This summer, we hope to strengthen this program in order to include other topics, such as gangs and domestic violence,” she said.

Officer Capistrán also said that some of the officers who do not speak Spanish have notecards with common phrases used by the police in Spanish and English, given to them by a teacher in Gaston County. “This material also helps officers communicate with the Latino community through a few words or sentences in Spanish, said the officer.

#### **Questions of the attendees**

The three bilingual officers, in addition to maintaining order for the mobile consulate, also answered the questions of those in attendance.

Paulo Quiróz and Rocío Veloz asked them if officers were able to stop cars without cause. The officers responded that drivers should always be told why they had been stopped. “Of course we stop people for speeding, for violating traffic laws, for expired tags, among other reasons,” said Officer Jaimes.

“Is it possible for them to pull us over for being Latino?” asked Veloz, “because one time I hadn’t done anything wrong and they stopped me. I didn’t have a driver’s license and I presented my consular registration – they let me go, but they wrote me a ticket for driving without a license.”

“They shouldn’t stop you for being Latino, but rather because you’ve committed an infraction,” replied Jaimes, “the law is the same for everyone, although officers may differ.”

**Source:** *La Noticia*, April 22, 2009. Translation by Lauren Hedge and Julie Weise.