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LABOR CAMP SEES SUCCESS

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When an unlikely group of farmers, migrant workers and businessmen came together 18 months ago to run Everglades Labor Camp, they never dreamed they would meet with the success they have. Dade County turned management of the 420-trailer camp over to the nonprofit Everglades Community Association in December 1982. Metro commissioners had voted in 1980 to close the camp at 19400 SW 376th St., saying it was losing thousands of dollars every year. By the end of 1983, the association had posted net profits of \$130,000. Similar profits are expected for this year, leaders said Thursday.

Everglades residents say their needs are being met like never before. Repairs are made quickly. About 25 decrepit trailers have been completely renovated. Incoming migrants no longer have to wait two weeks at the gate to get a trailer. The camp is open during the summer. Police have been hired to patrol on weekends. Much of the success, according to association chair Cipriano Garza, is due to camp manager Enrique Vazquez, who has enforced a strict rent collection policy. He earns \$22,500 a year. As an incentive to collect rent from tenants, Vazquez also was promised 10 percent of the first year's profits. The 48-year-old camp manager told board members Thursday he planned to give back to the camp at least half of the \$13,000 bonus he earned.

"We never dreamed we would make this much money the first year," Garza said. "Mr. Vazquez deserves every penny. Without him doing such a good job collecting the rent money, we couldn't be doing the things for the camp that we are doing." Another board member, the Rev. Bill Chambers, agreed. "It was rough at first," he said. "People didn't believe farmers and workers and businessmen and clergymen could all work together. But we have. The camp has become a success and our main goal of providing adequate housing for the migrants is being realized," Chambers said. About 130 families now live at the camp. During the peak of the winter harvest season, as many as 400 families live there.

Vicente Sanchez, who lives year-round at the camp, said the new management has greatly improved the camp. "It is very different from when the county was here," Sanchez said. "The people would arrive from up north and they would wait one or two weeks in front of the camp to get a house. Now there has not been one person who had to wait. "The managers listen to our needs. They are interested in providing adequate housing for everyone," he said.

Another farmworker resident, Pedro Garcia, said he likes the new tougher rent policy. Residents pay \$50 per week for a two-bedroom trailer and \$55 per week for a three-bedroom unit. The price was recently lowered \$5 during summer months because so little work is available for farmworkers. Before the association took over, Garcia said, some tenants refused to pay the rent and then laughed at residents such as Garcia who struggled each week to make the payments. " 'Look, I drink a lot of beer and I owe \$100 in rent and still I stay here,' " Garcia recalled one man saying. "Now it is fair for everyone," Garcia said. "We who put our backs to the sun every day have a right to have decent housing. Everyone should pay their share and now they do," Garcia, 56, said.

The county owns and insures the camp property and trailers, Garza said. The association leases the land for \$1 per year. With money from the rent, Vazquez said, the association bought a garbage truck, two lawnmowers, a dump truck and 100 used refrigerators for trailers. Members spent \$40,000 last year for off-duty Metro police officers to patrol the camp on weekends. One major expense involves quarterly \$58,834 payments on a \$2 million federal loan Metro took out to buy 200 new trailers in 1981. Board members eventually want to use funds to replace run- down trailers with permanent houses.