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'Recovery Express' riders heading to D.C. for foreclosure help

By Hilary Costa
East County Times
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Forty-five people at ground zero of the foreclosure crisis boarded a charter bus bound for Washington, D.C., on Friday armed with their pleas for government intervention — but not before receiving a blessing of holy water to keep them safe on their journey.

Antioch's Holy Rosary Church was the launching point for the "Recovery Express," a bus that will pick up community activists in eight cities before landing in the nation's capital to lobby politicians for help.

The trip has been organized by the faith-based PICO National Network and, locally, Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization.

"I want to help the millions of families that are expected to lose their house if we don't help on this problem," said Bernice Ramos, a CCISCO member who lost her Antioch home to foreclosure in November.

The Recovery Riders, as they're calling themselves, will arrive in Washington on Monday after stopping in Denver; Kansas City, Mo.; Springfield, Ill.; Flint, Mich.; and Camden, N.J. — all cities where foreclosures have forced thousands of families from their homes.

PICO is a network of 52 faith-based organizations and 1,000 church congregations across the country that works on community improvement projects and securing affordable housing. CCISCO, founded in 1996, has focused on stemming the foreclosure tide in Contra Costa County over the past year.

"We're ready to roll through the land to season every community with courage," said the Rev. Lucy Kolin, a PICO leader and Oakland pastor.

Every week 40,000 families in the U.S. lose their homes to foreclosure, Kolin said.

Activists said they want elected officials and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner to compel banks to work with distressed homeowners on reconfiguring their loans and following through on promises to modify mortgages whose rates have skyrocketed.

"This is the right thing to do," said Antioch City Councilwoman Martha Parsons, who will meet with the activists in Washington on Tuesday. "We have to

give the people that have been hurt so badly by this hope. For many of them that's all they have left."

Some people said they have already exhausted every option.

"As soon as you say 'modification' they put you on hold forever," said Carmen Landeros, describing her attempts to salvage her Antioch home. She sat with her husband, Isidro Landeros, aboard the bus Friday morning amid bags of snacks, coffee and energy drinks to sustain the travelers.

Carmen Landeros said she's eager for her situation — and those of tens of thousands more Americans — to be recognized.

"When they see all these people," she said, "they'll know it's real."

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