

Cintas now under the public's watchful eyes

By Fidencio Enriquez

Last month, El Observador published an article which said that Cintas, the largest uniform supplier in North America, fired a number of its employees for not providing it with their Social Security numbers.

More recently, however, Cintas has come under public scrutiny after Forbes Magazine published an article in their Dec. 11, 2006 edition which reports on the myriad ways in which Cintas uses "deceptive sales practices."

Continuing with the ideas that Forbes Magazine presented, El Observador decided to interview small business owners affected by the sales techniques that Cintas has used to get the extra buck. We spoke with Jose Vargas, owner of an alignment and suspension repair shop in San Francisco, who was featured in the Forbes article; and Maria Baltazar, a small business owner in the Bay Area.

Vargas' problems began after signing a five-year contract with

Cintas. Every two weeks, Vargas paid Cintas to deliver clean shop towels, toilet paper, hand soap, hand-towels, and clean uniforms and to take the dirty towels and uniforms away for cleaning. Vargas said he was charged for items that were sometimes not brought, such as the hand soap, which was put off week after week, but which he was still charged for.

Major problems began when Cintas failed to credit six checks totaling \$1000. Though Cintas claimed they never received payment, Vargas got proof from the bank that those checks were cashed by someone from Cintas. What Forbes failed to mention was that a collection agency associated with Cintas called Vargas asking for the money with insults and threats.

Vargas decided to end his contract early and it was then that Cintas demanded he pay approximately \$4000 to cover the rest of the contract. Vargas contacted his lawyer who settled matters with Cintas. At the end, Vargas paid \$108 to cover the items he had to

keep.

Baltazar also entered a five-year contract with Cintas when she bought a pizzeria. Problems started when the delivery driver continuously failed to deliver the clean mop he was supposed to. Baltazar cancelled that portion of her contract, yet she kept being charged for it. Cintas then charged Baltazar for new t-shirts after her pizzeria reportedly failed to turn in the shirts her workers used, which Baltazar said is impossible because her workers would not want tomato-sauce covered shirts to take home.

Bigger problems with Cintas began when she sold her pizzeria to a friend. Cintas told Baltazar she had to keep paying for the services in the contract, which her escrow advisor said was not true if she no longer owned the business. The new owner of the restaurant did not want to take over the contract, but was willing to because of the friendship she shared with Baltazar. However, Cintas management were never available to discuss the terms of

the services with the new owner, never picked up the inventory that remained in the pizzeria, and that was the end of the contract.

Vargas, who now directly pays his business' materials instead of using service companies such as Cintas, advises small business owners who enter a contract with service companies to not pay for services they are not receiving, to sign a contract for

only one year, to save all receipts, and to pay with checks so as to not be taken advantage of by service companies.

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