

# Sculpture honoring work of braceros unveiled during Stockton celebration

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STOCKTON — A sculpture honoring the contributions of millions of Mexican immigrant laborers who came to the United States more than 50 years ago, and who are still seeking to recoup some of their wages, was unveiled Sunday in Stockton.

The statue honors the "braceros," after the Spanish word for arm, who came to this country under an agreement between the United States and Mexico aimed at filling labor shortages caused by World War II.

The sculpture was dedicated at McLeod Lake Park as part of a day-long celebration honoring International Bracero Day. The day marked the 60th anniversary of the date when the first workers arrived

in the San Joaquin Valley.

Although they're being recognized by the memorial, a group of remaining braceros and their heirs are still trying to gain the recognition of the courts.

They filed a class-action lawsuit in San Francisco in March 2001 seeking repayment of money deducted from their paychecks.

Under the agreement between the United States and Mexico, 10 percent of each worker's wage was withheld and transferred, via U.S. and Mexican banks, to an individual savings fund. But many braceros said they never received the money.

Between 1942 and 1964, as many as 5 million men worked as braceros in this country, but the withholding was discontinued after 1949 and only applies to about

300,000 of the workers. Advocates say at least \$500 million is owed to the braceros, including interest.

Late last month, a federal judge dismissed most of the suit.

The suit targeted the U.S. and Mexican governments and Wells Fargo Bank, which was in charge of transferring the funds.

Braceros attorney Jonathan Rothstein said he will continue to pursue the case.

Wells Fargo officials have said they have few documents, but said they believe that the bank complied with its obligations under the old arrangement.

A commission of Mexico's Congress also is investigating what happened to the money. Government officials first promised to help the braceros more than three years ago.