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Detainees go to court in a ballroom

JEFF REINITZ, Courier Staff Writer

WATERLOO - The first 10 people to be charged in connection with Monday's immigration raid in Postville received their first court appearance Tuesday afternoon.

The Electric Park Ballroom on the National Cattle Congress grounds was converted into a makeshift federal courtroom for the occasion.

On the dance floor, Magistrate Judge Jon Scoles sat before a curtained screen that held the seal of the United States.

The 10 detainees, all captured while working at Agriprocessors meat-packing plant, sat in a single row listening to plastic headphones to hear the proceedings translated into Spanish.

Charges ranged from illegal reentry to aggravated identity theft.

Defense attorney Stephen Swift said one of the defendants, Noe Castillo-Ordonez, was born in 1990 and is a juvenile.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephanie Rose told the court he had tried to pass himself as 20 when working at the plant and during his first contact with Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. She said he will be treated as a juvenile until the matter can be sorted out.

Scoles set a status hearing for the 10 for Tuesday.

The 10 will remain in custody until then and were sent out of the NCC grounds to federally certified jails in Iowa, said Chief Judge Linda Reade.

Spectators for Tuesday's 10-minute hearing consisted mainly of attorneys and interpreters.

Absent were any family members of the detainees, said Cheryl Roberts, a volunteer for El Centro Latinoamericano. The social service organization brought about 20 relatives from Postville to stay in Waterloo, but they stayed away from the court hearings, she said,

Court at the Electric Park Ballroom continues this morning (Wednesday) with preliminary hearings for nine women picked up at the plant. Another 10 men will go before a magistrate after them.

Court schedules are being posted at the U.S. District Court for Northern Iowa's Web site at www.iand.uscourts.gov. It is under the "Waterloo Calendar" section.

ICE agents administratively arrested about 390 workers while serving a search warrant at Agriprocessors Monday.

Monday night and Tuesday, immigration officials processed the workers at NCC to determine which ones will face criminal charges. Those decisions continued Tuesday night, officials said.

Some 56 people have been released because of health or child care reasons. They were let go on the condition they would appear before a judge at a later date.

Those not charged with crimes still face administrative proceedings, which could lead to removal.