

SINTERACOPEA

COSTA RICA

San José Street Vendors Call For Truce For The Holiday Shopping Season

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Street vending is a tradition in San José, but a practice frowned upon by the law.

The bargains are not only inside the stores, but also on the Avenidas of downtown San José, where vendors flock their products to passersby.

The union representing this group of retailers, the Sindicato de Trabajadores Comerciantes Patentados Estacionarios y Afines (Sintracopea), is asking the Municipalidad de San José for a truce.

Over the years, the municipal police and the vendors have played a cat and mouse game.

Using signals among themselves, the vendors warn each other of the approaching police patrol and quickly clear out their makeshift store on the pavement. Once the patrols are gone, within minutes they are back in business, until the next patrol. Some get caught, only to be back on the street later in the day or the following at the latest.

The holiday season is big business for the vendors. A lot of street traffic with cash in their pockets.

Union president, Randall Zúñiga, explains that this group made up by a majority who cannot obtain traditional work or have limited job options, and should be supported, not persecuted.

Under the name “Proyecto Arroz y Frijoles” (Rice and Beans Project), the group considers they should be allowed to apply their trade in peace during the Christmas holiday period.

The proposal is to give the vendors a permit similar to that of door-to-door vendors. The Muni (municipality) would then charge a license fee and set conditions of operations, like the space they occupy on the sidewalks so as not to block pedestrian traffic, etc.

Zúñiga believes that his temporary solution is way out of the city and the vendors, at least for the end of the year shopping season.

