

Llano Grande Center for Research and Development



February 2008

www.llanogrande.org

STUDENT WORK FEATURED IN ART MAGAZINE

The students of Edcouch-Elsa time and time again prove themselves as leaders, often earning recognition.

This past month was no different, as the innovative and meaningful work of Llano Grande youth was celebrated in the January/February 2008 edition of *Communication Arts* magazine.



Students in last year's class learned about native plants as part of the park renovation project.

The article in the monthly journal featured the students' ongoing Mario Leal Park renovation project as an example of community youth work that incorporates design and activism principles to create positive change. The piece was one of several articles in the art journal highlighting the trend happening across the country.

In the piece, writer John Emerson lauds the students' and Center's place-based, community-minded approach: "By taking design to the streets, the students got a lesson in civic activism and learned that they have the power to direct public policy, to inspire their communities and to shape the public space we share."

Copies of the article can be obtained by contacting the Llano Grande office; and copies of the magazine can be purchased at www.commart.com.

NEW CENTER WEBSITE IN DEVELOPMENT

The Llano Grande Center is getting a new look – online.

Hoping to keep students and stakeholders more consistently updated about the work of the Center, as well as create a more user-friendly online presentation of Llano Grande and increase traffic, the Center has been in development talks with Harlingen-based web-development company MPC Studios to think about ways of redesigning the website, found at www.llanogrande.org.

One of the major concerns of the current site was the inability of the staff to update the homepage with current news and a calendar of events as a way to let visitors know what Llano Grande was up to. Other issues included broken links, somewhat confusing



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The Center's current website, located at llanogrande.org, is being redeveloped as part of a plan to update the Center's online presence with updated info, pictures and video.

LG TO ATTEND NORTH DAKOTA STUDY GROUP

The Llano Grande Center will brave the northern cold this February to attend the North Dakota Study Group and meet with educators from across the country on issues of progressive education.

Executive Director Francisco Guajardo and Program Director Olga Cardoso will be speaking at the gathering in Woodstock, IL, regarding approaches used in the classroom to teach students about – and organizing them for – community change.

The North Dakota Study Group is an annual gathering that originated in 1972 under Vito Perrone, then the dean of the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of North Dakota, now deceased. Created as a space where educators could discuss issues of child learning and assessment, the meeting now welcomes non-profit and advocacy groups to further the discussion and create plans of action.

Francisco, a member of the NDSG Planning

Committee, has become a prominent member of the symposium, and often serves as part of the welcoming and closing ceremonies. Olga has been asked to speak this year as part of a panel of educators who go beyond teaching to inspire activism in students.

Llano Grande Board Chair Miguel Guajardo will also be attending the meeting, as well as staff member

Juan Ozuna, who will be documenting the conference and creating a digital story for the closing of the event.

The Llano Grande Center has been attending the NDSG since 2000 as active participants and presenters. It has been through these meetings that the Center has developed relationships with many important people including pre-eminent education scholar

Gloria Ladson Billings; and Hattie Villanova, who helped introduce the Center to the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, with whom the Center now has a partnership.



Llano Grande Executive Director Francisco Guajardo gave the opening speech at last year's NDSG. He will be attending this year, along with LG Board Chair Miguel Guajardo and staffers Olga Cardoso and Juan Ozuna.

LG PARTNERS WITH TEXAS FOLKLIFE CENTER ON RADIO PROJECT

The Llano Grande Center is partnering with Texas Folklife Resources on a radio production project intended to preserve and celebrate the rich stories, culture and talent of the Rio Grande Valley.

The partnership will create radio programs for the local community, to be shared with a broader state and national audience. As part of this work, Valley students, teachers and community members will have the opportunity to produce radio stories at production workshops.

In addition, a live performance called Border Radio:

Voices of the Valley, will be performed throughout the Valley and recorded for national distribution on NPR stations.

Other partners in this effort include the Library of Congress, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Texas–Pan American, La Joya ISD and Edecouch-Elsa ISD.

Texas Folklife is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to preserving, celebrating and fostering the diverse and living traditional arts heritage of the Lone Star State.

EEHS TEACHERS LEARN DIGITAL STORYTELLING

There are many amazing stories here at Edcouch-Elsa High School – within our elders and within our students – and teachers began to learn how to tap into those stories this January through training with the Center.

Staff member Juan Ozuna led a small group of teachers through basic video-editing training, familiarizing local educators with the Sony Vegas creative software. This software is the same used by the Center in training students and groups across the country to create digital stories.

Enthusiasm for creating digital media in the classroom has been growing, with many teachers at EEHS now assigning digital media projects to their students – many of whom use the Center’s computer lab to complete their work.

Now, the district has pursued money to extend the capability of teachers in helping their students create such projects. Sonya Garza, EEHS Librarian, said the school received a grant allowing them to purchase several licenses of the Sony Vegas software, along with several video cameras, microphones, and two high-end Apple Macintosh computers.

Though a couple of the teachers at the training were familiar with editing digital video, many were new to the technology being presented by Juan during the two after-school sessions.

Leading the teachers through the basics of editing, as well as the basics of shooting video, many of the teachers said they would now be more willing to bring this technology into their classrooms as a way to explore learning beyond their classroom walls.

STORIES FROM HOME:

LG CLASSES LEARNING ABOUT ENVIRONMENT FROM ELDERS

The place that we call home has always been an integral part of Llano Grande’s work.

And while students last semester studied the history and significance of their local home, students in this semester’s Llano Grande class are learning about ways to preserve and protect their home through conversation and action regarding place and environment.

Through films, texts, activities and first-hand accounts from local elders who are invited to class, the students are exploring what the outdoor richness of the Delta Area once was, and how factors such as industrialization, modernization and even poor leadership have led to its deterioration.



Sra. Josefa Delgado, grandmother of Llano Grande students Samantha Herrera and Monica Orozco, visited the Center on a Friday to speak with students about her experiences living in the Valley and the environmental, economic and social changes she has seen.

Possible long-term projects being developed by the class include revisiting the issue of the Red Barn Chemical Company site in Elsa, which was first investigated by Llano Grande students back in 2002; petitioning local leaders for environmental measurements, such as creating recycling centers and penalties for people who burn trash; and performing environmental studies of local businesses.

The community change project is being supported for a second year through a partnership with the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in New York, who have provided the Center with curriculum and funds to hire consultants, professionals and project supplies.

**PARENTS: WANT TO PARTICIPATE? FEEL FREE TO COME BY OUR OFFICE AT ROOM A1 AT EEHS,
EMAIL US AT INFO@LLANOGRANDE.ORG, OR CALL US.**

LG STAFFER KARINA CARDOZA FINDS NEW OPPORTUNITY

The Llano Grande Center saw staff changes this December as Program Director Karina Cardoza resigned from her position to follow new opportunities.

Karina, a program director with the Center for a little more than a year, worked her last day on December 22.

Karina, Edcouch-Elsa class of '96 and Columbia University class of '00, is a product of the Center's formative period during the middle 1990's when Executive Director Francisco Guajardo took her and others to visit Ivy League schools. Karina also volunteered with the Center through the implementation of the Managing Information in Rural America (MIRA)

and the Kellogg Leadership for Community Change (KLCC) initiatives.

A former staff member for local U.S. Representative Ruben Hinojosa and the University of Texas-Pan American's External Affairs office, Karina helped to bridge many helpful connections in the work of the Center.

She will be taking her public relations skills to work with Hidalgo County's Information Technology department, where she will be responsible for creating a campaign to share news of the county's technology improvements.

KLCCU BEGINS WITH LLANO GRANDE

The idea of collective community change, fostered by the Kellogg Leadership for Community Change (KLCC) initiative, sparked pockets of learning here in Edcouch-Elsa and ten other communities across the country.

Those lessons from KLCC in leadership, resiliency and relationships helped to inspire and create movements for local community development, and will now be shared across each of the KLCC sites through Community U (short for University), a development program being initiated this May in South Texas.

Developed by Seattle-based Center for Ethical Leadership with help from the different KLCC sites, the purpose of the Community U is to offer a learning experience rooted in the rhythms and realities of

community life.

The expectation is that Community U will help to create spaces and events where members of the KLCC community and other groups interested in community change can gather to share their learnings about collective leadership for community change. The events will tap into local wisdom and increase collective power to create just communities everywhere.

The hope is that those who attend will also be able to earn graduate course credit for participation in the exchanges.

The first such learning exchange, being hosted by Llano Grande, is scheduled to happen May 15-18. More than 30 people are expected to attend. Two more learning exchanges are expected this year.

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navigational menus, and outdated information.

Some of the new features being proposed for the site include a news section on the front page, to be updated weekly or even daily with news and a calendar; a donation page that would let visitors know how they can support the Center; and an alumni section that would include posts and photos of what past Llano Grande

members are up to.

The site would also prominently feature many of the organizations and foundations who have supported the work of the Center, as well as an online archive to house much of the Center's historical local research including photos and video.

Pending board approval, the new site could go live by the middle of this summer. The Center is expected to begin actual development by late February.