

Llano Grande Center for Research and Development

Holiday Edition 2007



www.llanogrande.org

LLANO GRANDE RECEIVES STATE FARM GRANT

Enter Room A-1 at Edcouch-Elsa High School and you will not find your typical high school students. Instead, you will encounter world travelers, entrepreneurs, park designers, movie producers, event planners, grant writers, and socially-conscious adults in the making. Llano Grande students actively participate in non-traditional teaching and learning experiences that integrate meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich their learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Because students grow to understand the relevance of their learning to the world around them, students become motivated to set personal goals to do well in school and pursue a higher education.

Recognizing Llano Grande's contributions that enrich service-learning opportunities for students, State Farm awarded the Center at a press conference this

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The work of the Center was bolstered with an award from State Farm that supports the Llano Grande service-learning component. During the press conference, students and school administrators spoke to the power of service-learning, as well as State Farm's impact in the community.

LG TRAINS MICHIGAN KLCC SITE IN DIGITAL STORYTELLING

Digital storytelling has always been an important part of Llano Grande's work in the community, and the Center spent some time this holiday season with members of fellow KLCC site Boys & Girls Club of Benton Harbor, MI, to teach this skill and show them how it can be used for community change.

Coordinated as part of the Center's Captura initiative funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation earlier this year, which aims at expanding the use of digital storytelling within the community change work of the KLCC sites, the digital storytelling workshop helped to provide technology and skills to several high school and college age members of the Boys & Girls Club.

Through the workshop, the Club was able to provide eight new laptops as participants learned to discover their own personal story of family triumph, record it on video and pair it with appropriate photos, music and video as a way to create a digital story.

Those who participated showed a great amount of enthusiasm as they worked on personal stories that dealt with issues of single-parent homes, family loss and foster children, themes common for many of the children who learn at the Boys & Girls Club of Benton Harbor. The Club is a part of the second cohort of the

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LG BEGINS TO RECORD STORIES OF COLLEGE STUDENTS

Since its inception, the Llano Grande Center has worked to create access to higher education for local students, a story best captured in the documentary Edcouch-Elsa, produced in 2001 by the Center that follows the story of four high school seniors as they work to get into college.

This December, staff members began documenting the story beyond matriculation. Beginning by interviewing Edcouch-Elsa alum at Kalamazoo College, LG staffers are looking to capture the experiences of local youth who are now dealing with the issues of being far away from home, learning to be independent and surviving in an environment far more challenging than Edcouch-Elsa High School.

The goal of this video documentation is to follow up on the work of the Center past the high school experience and gauge the impact of the Center on students' ability to succeed in college, as well as to learn about the

challenges and triumphs that our youth now have in campuses across the country.

While at "KZoo" this month, where ten local students attend, staff members sat down to film interviews with Nadia Casaperalta, J.P. Galvan – EEHS class of 2006 – and Celina Silva – EEHS class of 2007 – to hear about their experiences as Mexican-Americans in a predominantly white, upper-class student body and the challenges of being so far away from family, friends and familiar food. LG staff also heard about the pressures these students feel to fairly represent their community and the comfort they continue to find in each other.

LG staff plan on visiting Kalamazoo again to continue interviewing students there, as well as other universities where recent graduates are now attending. LG alumni are currently found in schools such as Johnson & Wales University in Providence, RI, Texas A & M University, and MIT in Boston.

LG ALUMNI MAKING CONNECTIONS IN NORTHEAST

Former LG student Steven Ozuna, now a freshman at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, RI, studying retail marketing, first got his taste of the fashion industry while working with the Center on a partnership with the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum.

In a special piece this month, Steven reflects on some of the opportunities he has gained through his relationship with the Center.

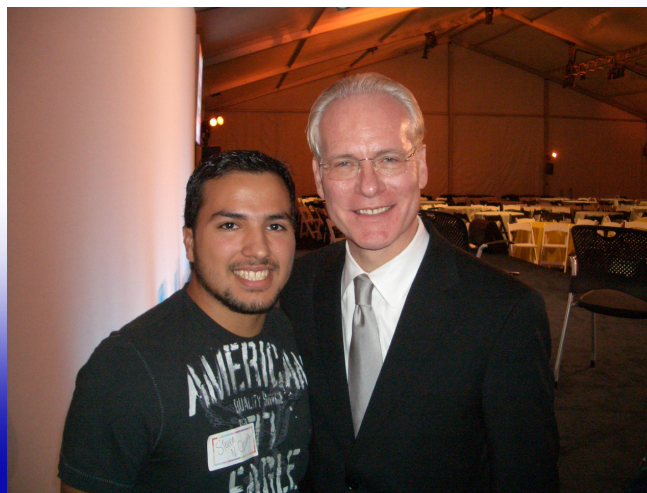
To kick off National Design Week, the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum held the Teen Design Fair 2007 and I was lucky enough to attend thanks to the kind people at the museum and Llano Grande. I arrived there a little late but made it in time to talk to a few of the many designers at the event.

I first talked to David Rodriguez, an award-winning designer whose designs have been featured in *Harpers Bazaar*, *W* and *Elle*, as well as worn by celebrities including Kirsten Dunst, Carrie Underwood, and Eva Longoria. He told me it would be best to gain experience in the retail business for a healthy portion of your life so you know basically what to do

and what not to do in order to run a successful business, which is one of the reasons I'm attending Johnson & Wales University. Another tip I got from him was to never leave a business on a bad note. If I was going to

quit a business or something, to do it as professional as possible because EVERYONE in the retail/fashion business knows EVERYONE and they talk - more like gossip - a lot.

Although I didn't get to speak with him directly, I was able to get useful advice from Isaac Mizrahi (designer for Target stores). He talked about school and how important it is to develop relationships with your professors as well as



Steven with Tim Gunn, Chief Creative Officer at Liz Claiborne Inc. and co-host of the TV show Project Runway, at the Teen Design Fair held during Design Week in New York hosted by the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum.

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LG MARKS 10TH ANNIVERSARY WITH HOLIDAY PARTY

The Llano Grande Center welcomed friends new and old at the Llano Grande House this past holiday season to celebrate the ten years of history created by all of the students, families, teachers and others who have been a part of the work.

Opening the doors of the House to the community, current staff members were warmed to see so many of the people who have been a part of the Center in one way or another, including students who have gone through the program, parents who have supported the work, and those who were employed by the Center.

The Center also welcomed many of those people who have supported the work, including school administrators, elected officials and community leaders.

As part of the celebration, an exhibit of photos documenting Llano Grande's work were displayed around the House, and people involved in the work at various points were invited to speak about the Center's history. The staff also shared the digital stories created

by students in this year's class.

Though Executive Director Francisco Guajardo and his former high school students – including current Program Director Delia Pérez, EEHS class of 1993 – initiated the early work with trips to Ivy League universities, Llano Grande was not formalized until 1997 when the Center received its non-profit status and a startup grant from the Annenburg Rural Challenge.

Since then, the Center has worked with hundreds of students to apply and attend college, collect hundreds of oral histories documenting the history of the Delta Area, and change the community through service projects.

This holiday celebration is the first of several events taking place this year to mark the decade of work. The Center

also plans on holding a formal gala in May, as well as move forward with publishing a book chronicling the history and philosophy of Llano Grande.



Dozens of families came to celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Center during a Holiday Party hosted at the Llano Grande House this past December. Above, Executive Director Francisco Guajardo (center, in black) talks with families during the event.

LG, IMMIGRANT FAMILIES LEARN ABOUT COLLEGE OPPORTUNITIES

For many here at Edcouch-Elsa High School, the prospect of going to college seems difficult already. For a few others, not having certain documentation sometimes makes it seem almost impossible.

Earlier this month, the Llano Grande Center hosted a workshop at the Llano Grande House with immigrant families from across the Delta Area to learn about the higher education opportunities for students who are undocumented or don't have a Social Security number.

Nicole Luna and Lizbeth Garza, representatives from the University of Texas-Pan American, and Maria De Leon, a representative from South Texas College, were invited to speak to students and their parents about the different avenues undocumented students have for applying to and paying for college.

Families were able to ask questions of the admissions reps, pick up applications from the respective schools and get help filling out forms for financial aid.

The idea for the meeting sprang up when Ana Valdez, the mother of Llano Grande alum Edyael Casaperalta, brought a friend by the Center who was looking for help getting her undocumented son into college. Edyael, EEHS class of 2001, was one of several students who testified before the state legislature in 2000 on behalf of House Bill 1403 which provided for state financial aid for undocumented students graduating from Texas high schools.

Realizing that there were several parents in the community who faced similar issues, the Center initiated the workshop.

LG PARTICIPATES IN LEARNING JOURNEY TO OAXACA, MEXICO

Llano Grande alum and former employee Edyael Casaperalta spent almost two weeks touring Oaxaca, Mexico this past October as part of learning journey hosted by the Berkana Institute.

The purpose of the journey was to gain insight into lifestyles – especially traditional ones found throughout the indigenous Mexican state - that are conscientious of sustainable living and respecting the environment.

Along with a group of a dozen or so other people from around the world, the group visited Oaxaca City, San Cristobal de las Casas in Chiapas and Caracol Oventic, a Zapatista community in Chiapas, to learn about sustainable lifestyles that do not rely on consumerist markets, as well as celebrate and honor local traditions.

Participating through a scholarship offered by the Berkana Institute, Edyael documented the trip as a way to bring learning back to the Llano Grande Center. Using



Edyael and a new friend filming part of her learning journey in Oaxaca with the Berkana Exchange.

footage from the trip, she plans on producing a digital story that reflects on the learning from her experiences there.

The Center has been a learning center of the Berkana Institute since 2006, participating in the Seattle-based organization’s learning journeys and exchanges with other learning centers from around the world. The group focuses on identifying and uniting learning centers working on creating sustainable communities.

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your own peers, another thing that I’ve been trying to do while at the university. They are the ones that can help you climb that corporate ladder faster and give you much needed recommendations for anything. The most important thing I got from him, though, was “don’t be afraid to fail in school”.

I was a little confused by this because that’s all I fear in school; but then he explained that in school you can fail something because you have people around you to help you get back on your feet, as well as a lot more time and support to help you with any subject you need. But if you fail in life at a job or something, you are the only one who can bring yourself back to your feet, and then the word gets around in “the biz” that you failed your first opportunity to make something of yourself and no one would want to hire you after that, making it more difficult to regain a position in the fashion world.

I really didn’t know what to expect when I arrived in New York, but it really helped me gain confidence in the decision to continue my education at Johnson & Wales University. I wanted to be in the business of the fashion industry and have design be something that I could do for myself only. With a powerful speech from Tim Gunn, Chief Creative Officer at Liz Claiborne Inc., I walked out of there feeling like I wanted to make a thousand donkey t- shirts for everyone to enjoy worldwide.

STATE FARM, from pg. 1

December with a \$25,000 grant that will help Llano Grande continue its services to students and families of Edcouch-Elsa.

“This generous contribution from State Farm is critical to the continuation of service-learning opportunities for Llano Grande students,” said Francisco Guajardo, Executive Director of Llano Grande. “Armed with the experience of meaningful service learning projects, which offer ongoing opportunities to develop new skills and ideas, Llano Grande students develop the confidence, leadership, and critical thinking necessary to help them succeed in college and beyond.”

This marks the fifth year in which State Farm has supported the work of Center, with awards totaling more than \$1 million.

MICHIGAN, from pg. 1

Kellogg Leadership for Community Change (KLCC) initiative, and is working to create empowerment among youth who live in a community that seems divided not only geographically, but racially and economically as well.

The workshop culminated in a presentation of the completed digital stories created by the participants to the larger Boys & Girls Club community. The Club Manager Liji Hanney said the workshop not only helped those participants learn to open up and share their story, but as well encouraged many of the other youth to begin taking an interest in digital storytelling.