

el

Independiente

A publication of the University of Arizona School of Journalism

Health & Wellness

Market On The Move
Fresh, Affordable Produce

El Rio Health Center
Offering Education on Diabetes, Hep C

Life on the Minimum
Working to Make Ends Meet

Letter From The Editor

Since its inception, El Independiente's mission, first as a newspaper and later a website, has been to place a proverbial magnifying glass over the City of South Tucson, a community of roughly 5,500 people that personifies how size can be misleading considering its source material far surpasses its square footage.

As students and newcomers to journalism, we often, and sometimes unintentionally, learn more from our stories than our readers do. This semester, our reporters shadowed subjects who know what it's like to throw a 95 mph pitch at age 17 ("Hard Work, Humility a Recipe for Pitcher's Success" page 13), raise a family on a minimum wage job ("Life On the Minimum," page 4), fight back against a devastating disease ("Specialized Program Helps Treat Hepatitis C," page 22), and transform a business selling pico de gallo from a pushcart into a neighborhood staple ("The Don of Taqueria Pico de Gallo," page 28).

We found ourselves repeatedly drawn to narratives that detailed the state of health and wellness in the area we cover. El Rio Community Health Center remains a vital resource for those seeking treatment and support in and near South Tucson, while local markets and restaurants have defied the Americanized beans-and-grease stereotype by not only

servicing fresh and locally-grown foods, but by targeting Tucsonans who may not otherwise have access to healthy - and affordable - cuisine.

As the stories filtered in throughout the semester, we discovered that the concept of "health" was much broader than we had initially realized, and incorporated our best work that explores not only the physical wellness of South Tucson, but the sense of wellness achieved through recreation, culture and even education.

The wider we opened our lens, naturally, the more perspectives flooded in, and we worked hard to include as many of them as we could here.

We thank you, as always, for picking up this semester's edition of El Independiente, and hope you enjoy the perspectives that not only grace its pages, but graced our impressions of the field many of us are just now officially pursuing. Their presence may have been fleeting, but each was memorable, and worth sharing with you.

Kate Newton
News Editor

Spring 2014

El Independiente

What's inside

Health & Wellness

4 Life on the Minimum

By Iain Gordon

6 — Traducido por Ferdane Mercanli & Lizbeth Feria

8 Composer Provides Voice with 'Illegal Alien'

By Drew McCullough

10 Student-Centered Curriculum Works For Ochoa

By Hollie Dowdle

13 Hard Work, Humility a Recipe For Pitcher's Success

By Drew McCullough

15 — Traducido por Yanett Serrano

17 Market On The Move — Fresh and Affordable Produce

By Ashlie Stewart

18 Sunnyside Helps Pregnant, Parenting Teens Graduate

By Caitlin Schmidt

20 Local Restaurants Give Tips on Cooking Healthy Mexican Food

By Austin McEvoy

22 Specialized Program Helps Treat Hepatitis C

By Caitlin Schmidt & Litzy Galarza

24 New Bike Club Pumps Kids Up

By Hollie Dowdle

25 El Rio Health Center Provides Specialized Care, Free Diabetes Education

By Caitlin Schmidt

27 Drop Boxes Aim To Reduce Drug Abuse

By Ashley Powell

28 The Don of Taqueria Pico de Gallo

By Scarlett McCourt

30 — Traducido por Rennie Ballesteros

32 Autism Program Blossoms at Special Needs School

By Austin McEvoy

34 Anita Street Market Does Chorizo Right

By Heidi Jaenicke

35 Organizations Help Secure Healthcare for South Tucson

By Kate Newton

38 Summer Recreation Activities in Tucson

By Jordan Clifton

Derek Evans

& Austin McEvoy

Photo by Ryan Revock

SPRING 2014

NEWS EDITOR **Kate Newton**
 MANAGING EDITOR **Scarlett McCourt**
 DESIGN EDITOR **Drew McCullough**
 PHOTO EDITOR **Ryan Revock**
 NEWSROOM MANAGER **Sam Leuck**
 COPY CHIEF **Alyssa DeMember**
 WEB EDITOR **Jordan McMahan**
 SPANISH EDITORS **Litzy Galarza & Javier Pineda**

COPY EDITORS **Hollie Dowdle**
Austin McEvoy
Ashley Powell
Giles Smith
Ashlie Stewart

REPORTERS **Jordan Clifton**
Derek Evans
Iain Gordon
Heidi Jaenicke
Soinneah Monks
Caitlin Schmidt

FACULTY ADVISOR **Maggy Zanger**

El Independiente Translators from the Translation and Interpretation Program of the Spanish and Portuguese Departments: Lizbeth Feria, Ferdane Mercanli, Yanett Serrano, Rennie Ballesteros.

El Independiente page design assisted by UA School of Journalism publication design class and Professor Gawain Douglas.

Check us out online! www.elindenews.com



Mariluz Rangel-Huerta looks over old family photos in her Tucson apartment.

Photos by Ryan Revock

Life on the Minimum

By Iain Gordon

“I don’t like nothing free,” she says. A smile crosses her face, but the eyes remain fierce.

Her dark hair is pulled back in a smart bun, and her lipstick is a confident cherry red. Four of seven piercings in her right ear are filled with studs, and another is centered in her bottom lip.

“How can I eat something if I don’t earn it?”

Mariluz Rangel-Huerta answers herself: it was for her kids. For her kids, she pursued the American Dream—a brighter future and greater opportunities. To make it their reality, she left behind everything she knew of her life in Mexico.

“In those days [it] was easy,” she laughs. “Just... pull it up and come on through.” She lifts up an invisible curtain and ducks under.

She is a grandmother now, and far away from her beginnings in Mexico City: not far enough, however, to outlive the nickname that originated there. Her name is Mariluz — but most everyone calls her Flaca: the pretty, skinny woman.

The tan dust of South Tucson whips gently around the feet of her armchair—a big, cushioned, living room chair bleached and eroded by the constant sun that comes with sitting outside all day, every day. Birds call from the palm trees. Old truck engines growl up and down 25th Street, the familiar hum of ’60s-era American power in their throats. Clotheslines

ring the faded backyards of the neighborhood.

A few feet away, a line of people stretches from a small house onto the sidewalk. The house is the Casa Maria Soup Kitchen, and Flaca has been coming here for more than 23 years, both to stand in line and work behind the counter as a volunteer.

“I like to work for my things,” she says. “I like to [set] my table with the food and say, ‘I work for it.’”

Flaca is a part of a steadily growing number of Americans known as the working poor: the people who work full-time yet still live below the poverty line.

They are the people who make your burgers, bag your groceries and greet you from behind the counter at the gas station. And

this morning, many of them stand in the line that stretches down the sidewalk.

In 2000, the U.S. Department of Labor estimated there to be 6.4 million working poor, and by 2010 that number jumped to 10.6 million. For many of these workers, a life of minimum wage keeps the American Dream out of reach. Around the nation people have begun calling for a change, including President Barack Obama, who pushed the idea of a drastically higher minimum wage at a governors’ conference in early March.

The call for a higher minimum wage has been made, not only by President Obama, but through a movement that started in the greasy, back-room kitchens of America’s favorite fast-food restaurants. Now, that movement has taken to the streets of New York, D.C., Chicago, Detroit, and right here in Tucson. The local initiative began when protestors picketed outside of McDonald’s on the corner of Speedway Boulevard and Alvernon Way in early December, demanding an increase in the minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

“For the Tucson area...it actually requires about a \$22-an-hour wage to make ends meet,” says Maya Castillo, president of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Arizona Local 48. “And that’s basically, pay your rent, buy your groceries, not be on public assistance.”

The union played a major role in organizing the December protest, citing the growing disparity between the minimum hourly wage, which is \$7.90 in Arizona, and Tucson’s living wage, which is about \$22.14 for a full-time worker with one child, according to the Economic Policy Institute’s Family Budget Calculator.

A sandy-coated mutt wanders over to sniff at Flaca’s feet, probing for scraps. The hair on his back is coarse like broom fibers, the desert breeze doesn’t move it an inch. Flaca glances down to acknowledge him, and continues on.

“Today I’m not a mom, I’m the dad!” she says. As an immigrant single mother of three, Flaca’s American life has consisted of minimum wage jobs, playing mom, playing dad, and busting her ass every day to make it in her crazy new world. With a grimace, she remembers



Mariluz Rangel-Huerta has volunteered at the Casa Maria Soup Kitchen for more than 23 years.



Mariluz Rangel-Huerta looks at an old photo of two of her sons, Omar and Fernando with herself.

talking about AIDS, pregnancy and condoms with her sons, miming an unrolling motion in the air. “No, never trust a girl! Never!”

And then there were the bills. Bills. Bills. Bills. Usually, they left her with \$25 to survive on, and support her family, until the next paycheck. There was never more than just enough, she recalls, even when she was fortunate enough to get minimum wage raises in the past.

“The government give you 10 cents more, OK? Raising 10 cents. But the next day you go to the store—the milk is 25 cents more, the tortillas, the basics—is more.” Today, she still works fast-food, and the job hasn’t gotten any easier.

With the wage basically the same, and her employers now cutting her hours down to 30 a week, double employment is the only option for Flaca. She works at both Carl’s Jr. and Wendy’s.

Fellow Casa Maria volunteer Cesar Aguirre is not, unfortunately, surprised at Flaca’s circumstances.

“Full time employment here [in this neighborhood] is almost unheard of. Everybody I talk to, they’re working part-time and usually working two jobs,” says Aguirre. “The problem is that these people are working and they still don’t make enough money to get off welfare.”

Even as fast-food workers everywhere scrape by, many fast-food corporations and their CEOs enjoy increasing profits and huge benefits. Over the last four fiscal years amidst a recession, McDonald’s has reported a 130

percent profit growth. It paid out \$4.1 million last year to its highest paid executive.

These profits are not trickling down far past the CEOs, says Todd Stewart, the owner of numerous Kentucky Fried Chicken franchises throughout Arizona (and the former owner of a few in Tucson as well) says. Raising the minimum wage out of the blue to \$15 would be “catastrophic” in his mind, putting countless small business owners like himself instantly out of business.

“The margins are so slim in fast food,

because it’s so competitive,” Stewart says. He adds that with banks holding long-term loans over many small franchise businesses, the owners themselves

are not free to maneuver with pricing or wages much for fear of the banks recalling the loans, and forcing them out of business.

As Maya Castillo says, “The only one that’s winning in this is the corporations... That’s where the money goes. It’s going to the pockets of the 1 percent and that’s it.”

Crows-feet appear on Flaca’s features as she smiles in the yard of Casa Maria. Her eyes are warm now, her happiness infectious. The sun is peaking in the sky overhead and the line on the sidewalk has dispersed. She laughs at what she says next, as if to joke, but truly, she is proud. Her eyes tell it all.

“My kids say, ‘You’re the best mom in the world.’” She smiles once more. “So that makes me feel like I’m okay, you know?”

“How can I eat something if I don’t earn it?”

— Mariluz Rangel-Huerta



Mariluz Rangel-Huerta dentro de la cocina de la Casa María.

Foto por Iain Gordon

Viviendo con el Mínimo

Escrito Por Iain Gordon
Traducido Por Ferdane Mercanli y Lizbeth Feria

“No me gusta nada gratis”, dice ella. Una sonrisa se dibuja en su rostro, pero su mirada se mantiene firme.

Con su cabello oscuro recogido en un peinado de chongo, y sus labios pintados de un color rojo cereza. Cuatro de siete perforaciones en su oreja derecha tienen aretes, y otro está colocado al centro de su labio inferior.

“¿Cómo me puedo comer algo si no me lo gano?”

Mariluz Rangel-Huerta se contesta a sí misma: fue por sus hijos. Por sus hijos, buscó el sueño americano—un futuro más prometedor con mejores oportunidades. Para hacer [este sueño] realidad en sus hijos, dejó todo lo que conocía de su vida en México.

“En aquellos tiempos era fácil”, dice riéndose. “Solo súbela y entra”. Mariluz levanta una cortina invisible y se agacha debajo de ella.

Ahora es una abuela, y está lejos de sus orígenes en la Ciudad de México: sin embargo, no lo suficientemente lejos para dejar atrás el apodo que originó allá. Su nombre es Mariluz—pero casi todos le dicen “Flaca” por ser delgada y bonita.

El polvo color canela del Sur de Tucson pasa suavemente alrededor de las patas de su silla—un sillón grande y acolchonado blanqueado y deteriorado por la constante luz del sol; el resultado de estar afuera todo el día, todos los días. Los pájaros cantan desde las palmeras. Los motores de camionetas viejas rugen por toda la calle, el zumbido familiar de los años 60 de la era de fuerza americana en sus gargantas. Tendederos rodean a los patios descoloridos del vecindario.

Algunos metros de allí, una fila de gente se extiende desde una casa pequeña hasta la acera. La casa es Casa María Soup Kitchen (Comedor Comunitario Casa María), y Flaca tiene más de 23 años viniendo aquí, tanto para hacer fila como trabajar atrás del mostrador como voluntaria.

“Me gusta trabajar por las cosas”, dice. “Me gusta poner la comida en la mesa y decir, ‘trabajo por ella’”.

Flaca forma parte de una cantidad de estadounidenses, cada vez mayor conocidos como los trabajadores pobres: la gente que trabaja tiempo completo, pero aun así viven por debajo del umbral de pobreza.

Ellos son las personas que hacen sus hamburguesas, embolsan su mandado y lo saludan por detrás del mostrador en la gasolinera. Y esta mañana, varios de ellos esperan en la fila que se

extiende por toda la acera.

En el año 2000, la Secretaría del Trabajo de los Estados Unidos estimó que hay 6.4 millones de trabajadores pobres, y para el 2010 esa cantidad se elevó hasta 10.6 millones. Una vida de salarios mínimos mantiene el sueño americano fuera del alcance de muchos de estos trabajadores. Por toda la nación la gente ha demandado un cambio, entre ellos el Presidente Barack Obama, quien apoyó la cuestión de un salario mínimo más alto en una conferencia de gobernadores a principios de marzo.

El llamado por un salario mínimo más alto se llevó a cabo no solo por el Presidente Obama, sino también por medio de un movimiento que tuvo sus inicios en las cocinas grasosas de los restaurantes de comida rápida favoritos de los EE.UU. Ahora ese movimiento se trasladó a las calles de Nueva York, Washington D.C., Chicago, Detroit y aquí mismo en Tucson. La iniciativa local inició cuando un grupo de manifestantes protestaron afuera del McDonald’s ubicado en la intersección de Speedway Boulevard y Alvernon Way a inicios de diciembre. Los manifestantes exigían un aumento del salario mínimo a 15 dólares la hora.

“Para la comunidad de Tucson... en realidad se necesita un salario de 22 dólares la hora para sobrevivir”, dice Maya Castillo, la presidenta del Sindicato Internacional para Empleados del Sector de Servicio (SEIU, por sus siglas en inglés), Local 48 en Arizona. “Y eso es nada más, pagar la renta, comprar el mandado y no estar recibiendo asistencia pública”.

El sindicato desempeñó un papel fundamental en la organización de la manifestación en diciembre, demostrando la desigualdad cada vez mayor entre el salario mínimo por hora, el cual es de \$7.90 en Arizona, y la cantidad mínima necesaria para vivir en Tucson, la cual es alrededor de \$22.14 para un trabajador de tiempo completo y con un hijo, de acuerdo con la Calculadora de Presupuesto Familiar del Instituto de Política Económica.

Un perro callejero cubierto de arena, pasea y olfatea los pies de la Flaca, buscando sobras. El pelo en su espalda es grueso como fibras de escoba, la brisa del desierto no se lo mueve ni un centímetro. La Flaca lo mira, y continúa con su quehacer.

“¡Ahora yo no soy una mamá, soy un papá! Siendo una inmigrante y madre soltera de tres, la vida americana de la Flaca ha consistido en trabajos



Mariluz Rangel-Huerta con su hijo menor, Manny. (Foto cortesía de Rangel-Huerta.)

de salario mínimo, haciéndola de madre y de padre, se quiebra el alma trabajando todos los días para sobrevivir en este caótico mundo nuevo. Con una mueca en su rostro recuerda hablarles a sus hijos sobre el sida, el embarazo y los condones, imitando un movimiento como desarrollado algo en el aire. “¡No, nunca confíen en las muchachas, nunca!”

Y luego están los recibos. Recibos, recibos, y más recibos. Usualmente la dejan con \$25 para sobrevivir y mantener a su familia hasta el siguiente cheque de pago. Recuerda que nunca hubo más que lo necesario, incluso cuando tenía la suerte de que le aumentarían el sueldo.

“El gobierno te da 10 centavos más, ¿okey? Un aumento de 10 centavos. Pero al día siguiente vas a la tienda y la leche cuesta 25 centavos más, las tortillas, lo básico, cuesta más”.

Hoy en día, aún trabaja en restaurantes de comida rápida, y el trabajo no es más fácil.

Con básicamente el mismo salario, y sus empleadores recortándole las horas de trabajo a 30 horas por semana, dos trabajos es la única opción para la Flaca. Trabaja en Carl’s Jr. y Wendy’s.

Cesar Aguirre, compañero voluntario de Casa María, desafortunadamente, no está sorprendido de la situación de la Flaca.

“El empleo de tiempo completo aquí en este vecindario es casi inexistente. Todos con los que platico tienen trabajo de medio tiempo y usualmente tienen dos trabajos”, dice Aguirre. “El problema es que estas personas están trabajando pero aun así no ganan lo suficiente como para dejar la ayuda gubernamental”.

Mientras que los trabajadores de comida rápida apenas sobreviven, muchas empresas de comida rápida y sus presidentes ejecutivos disfrutan de grandes ganancias y enormes beneficios. En los últimos años fiscales en medio de una recesión, McDonald’s reportó un crecimiento de los beneficios del 130 por ciento. Y le pagó \$4.1 millones de dólares a su más alto ejecutivo.

Estos beneficios no están llegando más allá de los presidentes ejecutivos, dice Todd Stewart, propietario de numerosas franquicias Kentucky Fried Chicken por todo Arizona (y el antiguo propietario de unos pocos aquí en Tucson también). Aumentar el salario mínimo de la nada a \$15 sería “catastrófico” en su opinión, pondría a innumerables propietarios de pequeñas empresas fuera del negocio instantáneamente.

“Los márgenes son muy escasos en la comida rápida, porque es muy competitivo”, dice Stewart. Añade que con los bancos teniendo préstamos a largo plazo de muchos pequeños negocios de franquicias, los mismos propietarios no son libres para maniobrar con los precios o los salarios por temor a que los bancos les recuerden de estos préstamos, y con el poder de sacarlos del negocio.

Como dice Maya Castillo, “El único que va ganando en esto son las corporaciones... Ahí es donde va el dinero. Se va a los bolsillos del uno por ciento y eso es todo”.

Aparecen arrugadas alrededor de los ojos de la Flaca mientras sonríe en el patio de Casa María. Sus ojos son cálidos, su felicidad contagiosa. El sol en la cima a lo lejos y la fila de gente en la acera se ha dispersado. Ella se ríe de lo que dice a continuación, como si fuera una broma, pero verdaderamente se siente orgullosa. Sus ojos lo dicen todo.

“Mis hijos dicen, ‘Eres la mejor madre del mundo’”. Ella sonríe una vez más. “Eso me hace sentir que todo está bien, ¿sabes?”

Composer Provides Voice With 'Illegal Alien'

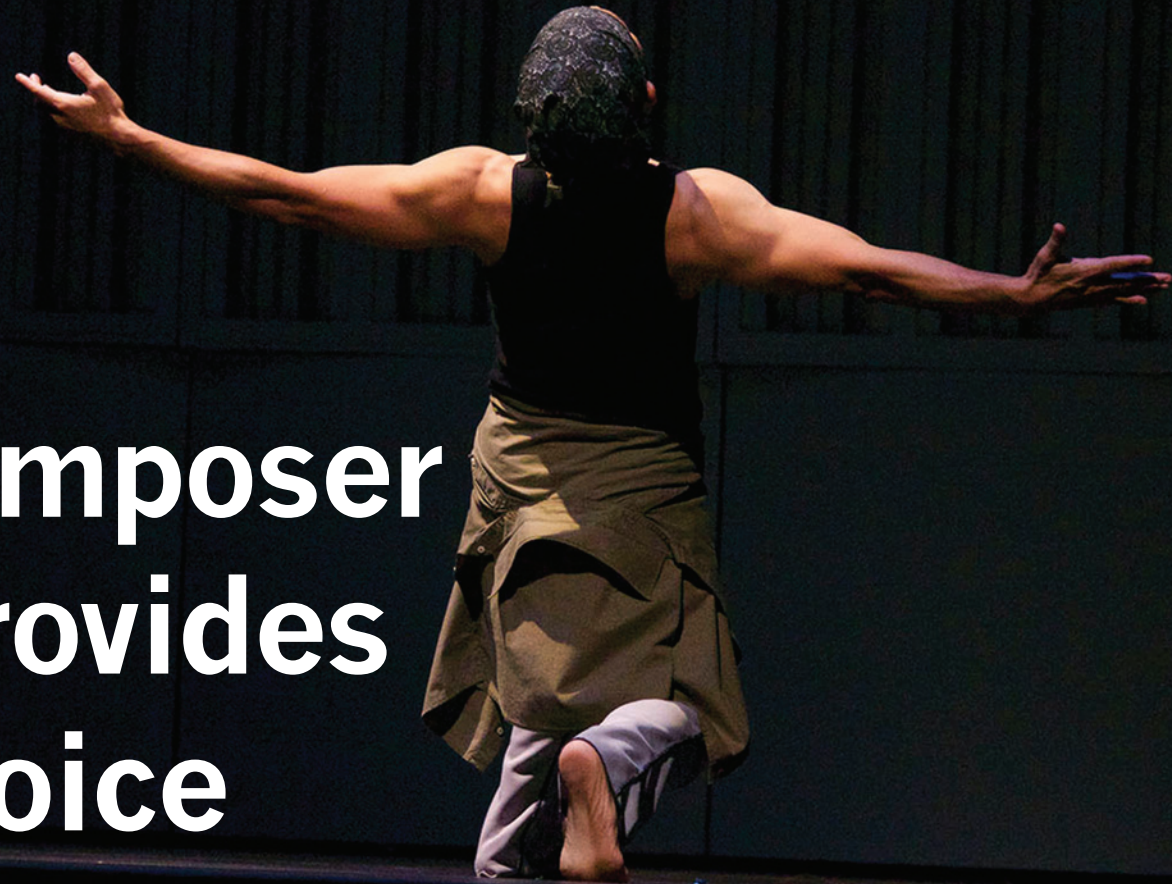


Photo by Drew McCullough

Isaac Chau, a dancer and choreographer, dances his part during the opera titled "Illegal Alien." The opera explores themes such as immigration and racism.

By Drew McCullough

As a child, Alfonso Molina always dreamt of becoming a musician. Molina began his musical career when he was 8 and started taking piano lessons in his hometown of Hermosillo, Mexico. A few years later, he decided to give up piano and teach himself how to play the guitar.

His vision of becoming a full-time musician intensified when he began playing with different Cuban and African-Cuban bands, which continued for a couple years. But, his aspirations changed when he started writing his own original music — he then dreamt of becoming a composer.

"I was used to being an instrumentalist," Molina says. "I was used to performing and being recognized for that."

"But then I stopped playing," he says. "I just knew my calling was composition."

Once he started writing music, he says he couldn't stop. "That's when I said, 'OK, now I



Alfonso Molina, 34, is a musical composer. He's been recognized for his compositions for the past 11 years. (Photo courtesy of Alfonso Molina)

have to be a composer," he says.

Molina, 34, is now pursuing a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in composition at the University of Arizona — but he's been making a name for

himself as a composer for the past 11 years.

His latest composition is a one-act opera titled, "Illegal Alien," which Molina premiered on Feb. 28 at the UA's Crowder Hall.

"Illegal Alien" is based on Molina's personal experiences and explores themes such as immigration, patriotism, "the American way," racism and human rights.

Although Molina has been crossing the border legally for 30 years, he says the piece is based on what his family members have experienced while trying to cross, as well as what he sees in the news everyday. Molina also wants to make a personal statement "as a Latin-American artist" through "Illegal Alien," he added.

"I'm trying to make it clear that we as artists are capable of writing interesting and smart things," he says, while still providing "an analysis and a good understanding of the whole situation that is going on ideologically, politically and philosophically" from multiple perspectives.

"Illegal Alien" also has a broader goal, Molina says, to provide Latin-Americans with a sense of empowerment through art.

"It was about giving people who are vulnerable a voice," he says.

Molina isn't the only person who thinks "Illegal Alien" has the potential to reach a wide audience.

Humberto Borboa, a UA music graduate student and a tenor in the opera, says he thinks it's a powerful piece.

"The subject is so strong," he says. "It just really [moves] you in some way. I think that gets the attention of the audience."

Borboa also says that Molina is a tremendous composer with "a great knowledge of music, techniques and musical effects."

Borboa says he's also a fan of Molina's contemporary style, which doesn't rely on the orchestra to produce all of the sound and incorporates multimedia sound effects into his opera.

Marty Constantine, a UA music undergraduate student and a tenor in the opera, says the plot of the piece intrigued him because of its modern relevance. It's not "just another opera about somebody cheating on somebody's wife in the 1700s," he added.

"It just sounded very interesting to be part of something so contemporary," Constantine says.

He also says working under Molina was a great experience because "as a leader, [Molina] is very hands-on in the sense that he's not afraid to tell you what you need to do or what you need to fix," but he's "not a dictator about it."

Although "Illegal Alien" recently premiered, Molina says there are no more performances currently scheduled. He says, though, that a group in Mexico is interested in performing it.

His first widely-recognized piece, however, was in 2003 when a documentary film making group asked him to compose the soundtrack for "De Nadie – Morir Cruzando," or "No One – Die Crossing," a film about Central-American immigration, he says.

"That was when I started to take [composing] seriously," he says.

Three years later, the group premiered the film in Park City, Utah, at the Sundance Film Festival — one of the largest independent film festivals in the U.S. — and won the 2006 Audience Award in World Cinema – Documentary.

Winning the award "was unreal," he says. "We weren't looking for a prize and that's the best way to receive [one] — when you're not expecting anything."

Molina says he and the group were also treated like stars during the festival and got to meet actors including Robert Redford and Robert Downey Jr., which was "amazing."

During the festival, the president of the American Society of Composers, Authors

and Publishers — a non-profit organization designed to protect its members' copyrighted work — also asked Molina to join the society, he says.

Since then, he's received a variety of different awards and honors. He says the most memorable, however, is the "Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes," or the national fund for culture and the arts, "which is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, award from Mexico."

The award provides recipients with financial support to create artistic works.

"Only 10 musicians a year get it in all of Mexico," Molina says. "So, it was very significant. It was the biggest award I have ever received because [it] allowed me to continue studying [in the U.S.]."

Molina has also premiered his compositions in different places around the world including Mexico, Germany, the Czech Republic, Bolivia and the U.S.

He has plans for the future beyond his recent opera — he says one thing he's currently working on is writing the music for a folk-opera in New York. The piece is based on a novel by Gabriel García Márquez, titled "Cronica de una Muerte Anunciada," and Molina previewed a bit of what his audience should expect.

"It's going to be very exciting," Molina says.



Photo by Drew McCullough

Humberto Borboa, a graduate student in the UA School of Music and a tenor in "Illegal Alien," says he's a fan of Molina's contemporary style.



Photo by Drew McCullough

Marty Constantine, a UA music undergraduate student and a tenor in "Illegal Alien," says he was intrigued by the plot of the opera.



Studio teacher Mimi Gray observes a student's self-portrait.

Photos by Hollie Dowdle

By Hollie Dowdle

Student-Centered Curriculum Works for Ochoa

The South Tucson community has proven its resilience once again. Just a few years ago, Ochoa Community Magnet School faced guaranteed closure, a failing score by the Arizona Department of Education and a neighborhood stereotyped for drugs and violence. In 2014 they're still open after receiving a B score and gaining more support than ever from the community, after the school was saved under the leadership of Principal Heidi Aranda and a unique approach to learning. Ochoa Magnet is a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade school at 121 W. 25th St. Although it's a public school, it uses an alternative mode of learning where teachers focus on discover-

ing how the individual child learns best. This mode of learning, known as the Reggio Emilia philosophy, originated in the small town of Reggio, Italy. It emphasizes the "image" of the child, meaning his or her sense of identity and self-importance. By recognizing the student's social, cultural and personal identity, teachers think students can understand who they really are.

"Everyone knows, 'I belong here, I am welcome,'" studio teacher Mimi Gray says. "They know they are acknowledged and respected."

In addition, the Reggio approach employs an "emergent" curriculum, which is flexible and constantly evolving to meet the needs of the students. In fact, the most notable difference between the Reggio approach and traditional teaching is how teachers structure classroom learning.

Teachers try to observe the children and their interests in the classroom, according to Kira Moore-Rendon, learning support coordinator and counselor at Ochoa. The school is still guided by state standards and students take the same standardized tests as non-magnet schools. However, the teachers try to embed the necessary knowledge of the curriculum into the children's interests, as opposed to using a straight curriculum and teaching by the book.

"If kindergarteners are really interested in dinosaurs, we incorporate dinosaurs into the

classroom, whether it's by literature about dinosaurs for reading or mathematical problems involving dinosaurs," Moore-Rendon says.

Ochoa wasn't always this progressive. In the winter of 2008, it was on TUSD's list of four schools that had to close. According to Principal Aranda, it was the hardest year of her professional career.

"I remember standing in this big room with all of the teachers and parents, and telling them the school was going to close," Aranda says. "That's a big deal."

After breaking the news, Aranda says the room turned into a campaign center.

"Parents and teachers immediately organized themselves and flipped on this switch," she says. "Parents were taking off work and going to Walgreens to get supplies for posters."

Aranda says the work of the community helped the school avoid closure. At one board meeting, more than 600 people gathered and made a human chain around the school. Hundreds of people wrote letters and attended board meetings, where many of them wanted to speak out in support, according to Aranda.

In March 2009, TUSD reversed its decision. A few months before, in January, Ochoa was approved to become a Reggio Emilia-inspired school and the process was underway.

"It was like going through growing pains at first, because the staff was unsure if it was best for the school," Aranda says.

At the end of the process, 100 percent of the school council voted to be a Reggio school.

"Anything that's worth doing in life is going to be difficult," she says. "If something is too easy, you have to wonder if it's that good."

Aranda's dedication to the school ensured it remained open and even brought their score from the Arizona Department of Education up from a failing grade, a change that she attributes to the Reggio program.

She also says the program succeeds because ownership isn't in the teachers' hands alone.

Kids are personally invested in the content of their classrooms, making it easier for them to make connections with what they're learning.

"Research says learning that involves children having ownership will be sustainable," Aranda says.

Gray has been studying the Reggio approach since 2000. After visiting Reggio, Italy, and fully embracing the fundamentals of the philosophy, Gray argues that students who immerse themselves in this mode of education actually learn more than children at traditional public schools because they are invested in their studies.

Four days a week, she works with groups of four to six kids at a time in her art studio for 45 to 50 minutes. According to Gray, the studio is not focused on art education like a regular public school classroom might be.

The classroom is not your standard rows of



Ochoa students work on their self-portraits.



Teacher Mimi Gray has been studying the Reggio approach since 2000.



Community members joined hands to protest the closing of the school in 2008. (Photo Courtesy by Ochoa Community Magnet School)

desks and dusty chalkboards. A sunny, open space filled with hundreds of different materials, colors and shapes, welcomes students. Easels stand sporadically throughout the room, surrounded by round and rectangular tables that serve for different activity stations.

One table, titled “the circle table,” is stacked with varied sizes of tangerine, magenta and aquamarine cardboard circles for the younger students. Organized shelves line the walls, some holding miniature mason jars of bright Crayola crayons while others display massive glass vases with sticks protruding out.

In order to teach basic knowledge about colors and shapes, Gray employs alternative methods to simply telling students what colors are. “Everyone is so concerned. Do the kids know their colors? And do they know their shapes?” Gray says.

During one class, she had a small metal tower standing in the center of the classroom with a basket of pink fabric beside it. She instructed the children to start decorating, and they instantly started hanging, draping and cutting.

“While they were doing it, they were learning how to tie knots, tie bows and work together,” Gray says. “They were cutting, and this stuff is kind of tricky to cut if you’re a new cutter.”

She added that Ochoa is different from regular public schools because the teacher suspends judgment.

“If a student comes up with a theory and it’s incorrect, the teacher will stand back and allow the child to figure its plausibility for themselves,” Gray says.

“It’s the process of finding out that is the focus of education here... not finding all of the right answers all the time.”

In addition, she says learning at Ochoa is about creativity, just as much as it is about math or science.

“It’s about constructing knowledge,” Gray says. “We all have to come to our own way of learning on our own.”

She believes knowledge comes and changes, is relative to the environment you’re in and relies on the marriage between creativity and problem-solving. This assertion is just one of the fundamentals of the Reggio approach. The staff and curriculum maintain that sustained learning is constructed through past and ongoing experiences and interactions with materials, knowledge and people.

“Working with materials and connecting it to context allows students to learn about the world,” Gray says.

This philosophy stems from the poem, “The Hundred Languages of Children,” written by a founder of the Reggio Emilia program. One stanza reads, “The child has a hundred languages, a hundred hands, a hundred thoughts, a hundred ways of thinking, of playing, of speaking.”

Ochoa employs this poem by recognizing how the school must offer students many ways of learning.

“There’s not one way to learn, and children need a lot of ways to research,” Gray says.

The staff believes every child is competent and important. In Gray’s class, she only offers the best brushes, paper and paint.

“Every kid’s a best kid,” she says. “We don’t give them anything funky or broken.”

In addition, students frequently draw self-portraits in order to illustrate how they see themselves and spark a discussion on self-awareness.

Illiana Reyes, an associate professor in early childhood education and sociocultural studies at the University of Arizona, has taught in both traditional and alternative learning environments. She says the Reggio Emilia approach gives the South Tucson community initiative and self-pride.

“The families care that their children continue progressing and that the Ochoa school is at the center of their community and activities,” Reyes says.

Cesar Aguirre, parent volunteer, says the high value on the child’s image is one of his favorite aspects of Ochoa. He’s been volunteering for the past four years, helping out one to three times a week in his first and fourth grade childrens’ classrooms.

“At one point I was commuting 45 minutes every day to bring my kids to this school. I could barely afford the gas,” Aguirre says. “That’s how much we love it here.”

According to Aguirre, the teachers at Ochoa are simply “amazing,” sincerely taking time to get to know children and their families. Some teachers have started taking Spanish classes to communicate better with certain kids and families.

Growing up, Aguirre says he was never told he was good enough in school, although he knew he was intelligent. Because he thought outside of the box, he felt he never quite fit in.

“It was very important that my kids be at a school where they were allowed to think what they think and be accepted and appreciated,” he says.

Aguirre’s fourth-grade daughter, Alissa Aguirre, says she loves her school because she feels safe in her classroom.

In addition, she gets to learn about topics she cares about.

“I like writing because the writing is focused on things I like, like medicine and diseases,” she says.

Aguirre has noticed what Ochoa specifically aims to do: incorporate topics students are interested in into day-to-day learning.

“At Ochoa, we are raising a generation of learners who are personally invested,” Principal Aranda says. Not only did the switch to a Reggio approach change Aranda’s professional career, it also transformed the way she sees learning.

“It’s not about having the perfect lesson plan,” she says. “It’s about using the children’s knowledge to drive the curriculum.”



Sati Santa Cruz Jr., 17, pitches for the Sahuarita High School varsity baseball team. The fastest he’s thrown is 95 mph.

DOMINATION — AT AN — EARLY AGE

Photos by Drew McCullough

Hard Work, Humility A Recipe For Success

By Drew McCullough

For Sati Santa Cruz Jr., a junior pitcher on the Sahuarita High School varsity baseball team, success has come at a young age.

Within the last year, the 17-year-old has verbally committed to attend the University of Arizona and play for its baseball team; played for the USA Baseball 17U National Development Team; and accepted an invitation to play in the Under Armour All-America Game Aug. 16 at Wrigley Field, home of the Chicago Cubs.

The fastest the 6-foot-3-inch, 225-pound right-hander has thrown is 95 mph, and he consistently throws in the low 90s. He struck out 77 batters last season and had a 2.66 ERA.

Although he’s made baseball his number one sports commitment, he played for his school’s varsity basketball team this season. He also recently gave up football and wres-

ting, two sports he was successful in, to focus his time on baseball.

None of his accomplishments would be possible without the hard work and commitment he puts into sports, he says.

“Just because I’m Sati doesn’t mean I don’t have to work hard in everything I do,” he says. “I have to compete for my position every day.”

He says it’s “a great honor” to be chosen for the Under Armour game. “It truly is. It shows me how hard I practice and how hard work pays off in the long run.”

He also has a sense of humility, says his mother, Edith Santa Cruz, that is well beyond his years, and contributes to his success.

“Sati is very humble,” she says. “With all the opportunities he’s had, he could be very prideful. But he’s not wrapped up in himself.”

She and her husband, Sati Santa Cruz Sr., who is also the assistant coach of the Sahuarita baseball team, try to keep him that way. They

say it’s important to teach their son that there will always be someone better than him, but to do his best and always strive to improve.

“Growing up he was always very competitive with himself,” his father says. “There was never a time where he said, ‘I don’t want to do this.’ He always strives to get better and comes ready to play everyday.”

That dedication has also helped him become successful off the pitcher’s mound as well.

Although pitchers generally are known for being inconsistent at the plate, Sati Santa Cruz Jr. is a “monster hitter,” says Sam Gelardi, the head coach of the Sahuarita baseball team.

“He’s probably one of the top five hitters in Southern Arizona,” Gelardi says. He expects young Sati might lead Southern Arizona in RBIs this year.

Sati Santa Cruz Jr. has a formula for success. “You just have to work really hard, keep your mind straight and don’t hang around with the wrong crowd.”

“All the kids look up to [Sati]. He’s been a leader since he was in elementary school.”

-Sati Santa Cruz Sr.

This mindset has also led him to leadership roles. “All the kids look up to him,” his father says. He’s been a leader since he was in elementary school.

“I tell him, ‘you can’t do anything dumb now because you’re a leader and the other kids will think it’s OK to do something dumb,’” he says.

Coach Gelardi says Sati Santa Cruz Jr.’s leadership qualities have made him an unselfish baseball player, which contributes to the team’s success.

“He cares about his teammates,” he says.

“He would rather please his teammates than please himself.”

His father says he’s also learned how to be a leader beyond the baseball field.

“If we go to a game and there are older people struggling with their chairs, he’ll go up and help them without me having to tell him.”

In that sense, “he’s got a kind heart,” his mother says. “He’s a sweet guy. He’s a big boy, but he’s still a kid at heart.”

Sati Santa Cruz Jr. credits his folks with his achievements. He says he wouldn’t be where he is today without the constant support of his number one role models.

“I just realize how much they do for me and that I need to pay them back somehow,”

he says. “So I’m just working hard and trying to make them happy — that’s all I can do.”

His parents’ support started at the beginning of his career and remains to this day.

His mother would catch pitches for him and his younger brother. His father would get off work, grab the kids and head to the baseball field.

“Sometimes I thought it was way too much,” his mother says. “But then after a while, I realized that this is what they truly love to do, so now I encourage it.”

Despite his recent accomplishments, Sati Santa Cruz Jr. has no intention of slowing down.

He says his number one goal for the upcoming season is to help himself and his team get better and win a state championship. He’s shooting for at least 90 strikeouts and an ERA of 1.0 or lower.

He says he’s also excited for what the future holds. But before anything, “I will definitely get my education [at the UA]. It’s a must.” After the UA, he says he plans to enter the Major League Baseball draft.

In addition to his parents, he credits “God for all of the blessings he’s given me,” he says. “I also want to thank my parents for pushing me.”



Santa Cruz is a “monster hitter,” according to his coach, Sam Gelardi.



DOMINACIÓN A UNA EDAD TEMPRANA

Fotos por Drew McCullough

Sati Santa Cruz Jr., 17, lanza para el equipo de béisbol del equipo universitario Sahuarita High School. Lo más rápido que ha arrojado es de 95 mph.

El Esfuerzo y La Humildad de un Joven Lanzador le Dan Buenos Resultados

Escrito Por Drew McCullough

Traducido Por Yanett Serrano

A Sati Santa Cruz Jr., estudiante de tercer año y lanzador del equipo de béisbol de la preparatoria Sahuarita, el éxito le ha llegado a una temprana edad.

Durante el año pasado, el joven de 17 años se comprometió a estudiar en la Universidad de Arizona en un futuro cercano y jugar en su equipo de béisbol; jugó para USA Baseball U17 National Development Team (equipo de béisbol nacional de desarrollo para jugadores menores de 17 años), y aceptó la invitación para jugar en Under Armour All-America Game (torneo donde participan los mejores jugadores de béisbol a nivel preparatoria de la nación) el 16 de Agosto en el campo de béisbol Wrigley, sede de los Chicago Cubs.

Lo más rápido que el lanzador diestro de seis pies y tres pulgadas de altura y peso de 225 libras, ha lanzado es de 95 mph, y constantemente lanza entre los 90. La temporada pasada ponchó 77 bateadores y tuvo un

promedio de carreras limpias permitidas de 2.66.

Aunque él ha hecho del béisbol su compromiso deportivo principal, esta temporada jugó para el equipo de básquetbol de su escuela. Recientemente también dejó de participar en fútbol americano y lucha libre, deportes en los cuales también sobresalía, para dedicarse al béisbol.

Ninguno de sus logros serían posibles sin el esfuerzo y la dedicación que le pone a los deportes, dice. “No solo porque soy Sati quiere decir que no me tengo que esforzar en todo lo que hago”, comentó. “Tengo que competir por mi puesto todos los días.”

Expresa que es un gran honor haber sido escogido para participar en el juego Under Armour. “Realmente lo es. Esto me demuestra que tan duro entreno y que nuestro esfuerzo rinde frutos a largo plazo”. También tiene una humildad que va más allá de su edad, la cual contribuye a su éxito, opina su madre, Edith Santa Cruz.

“Sati es muy humilde”, ella comenta. “Con todas las oportunidades que ha tenido, podría ser muy

orgullosa. Pero no está sumido en sí mismo”.

Ella y su esposa, el señor Sati Santa Cruz, quien es el entrenador asistente en el equipo de béisbol de Sahuarita, hacen todo para que él se mantenga así. Dicen que es importante enseñarle a su hijo que siempre habrá alguien mejor que él, pero que debe hacer lo mejor posible y siempre esforzarse en mejorar.

“Desde pequeño siempre ha sido muy competitivo consigo mismo”, afirma su padre. “Nunca hubo un momento en que me haya dicho, ‘no quiero hacer esto’. Siempre se esfuerza por ser mejor y siempre viene preparado para jugar todos los días”.

Esa dedicación también lo ha ayudado a tener éxito fuera del montículo de lanzador.

Aunque los lanzadores son conocidos por ser inconsistentes en el plato, Sati Santa Cruz Jr. es considerado un ‘gigante’ como bateador, dice Sam Gelardi, el entrenador del equipo de béisbol de Sahuarita.

“Es probablemente es uno de los mejores cinco bateadores del sur de Arizona”, menciona Gelardi. Es

pera que el joven Sati los dirija en las carreras bateadas impulsadas (RBI, por sus siglas en inglés) este año.

Sati Santa Cruz Jr. tiene una fórmula para su éxito. “Uno tiene que trabajar muy duro, mantener la mente enfocada y no juntarse con la gente equivocada”, él afirma.

Esta mentalidad lo ha llevado a ser un líder. “Todos los jóvenes lo admiran”, dice su padre. Él ha sido un líder desde la escuela primaria.

Le digo, “ahora no puedes hacer nada tonto porque eres un líder y los otros jóvenes pensarán que está bien hacer algo tonto”, comenta.

El entrenador Gelardi dice que las cualidades que tiene Sati Santa Cruz Jr. lo han convertido en un beisbolista generoso que contribuye al éxito del equipo.

“Se interesa en sus compañeros”, afirma. “Prefiere complacer a sus compañeros que a sí mismo”.

Su padre dice que ha aprendido a ser un líder más allá del campo de béisbol.

“Si vamos a un juego y hay personas mayores que están batallando con sus asientos, se acerca a ellos y les ayuda sin que yo le diga”.

En ese sentido, “él tiene un buen corazón”, agrega su madre. “Es un joven lindo. Es un muchacho, pero tiene corazón de niño”.

Sati Santa Cruz Jr. les agradece a sus padres por sus logros. No estaría donde está ahora sin el apoyo constante de ellos, sus ejemplos principales.

“Me he dado cuenta de todo lo que hacen por mí y que les tengo que retribuir de alguna manera”, expresa. “Así que estoy trabajando duro e intento hacerlos feliz – es lo mínimo que puedo hacer”.

El apoyo de sus padres comenzó al principio de su carrera y continúa hasta el día de hoy. Su madre atrapaba los lanzamientos que él y su hermano hacían. Al salir de trabajar, su padre los recogía y los llevaba al campo de béisbol.

“En ocasiones pensaba que era demasiado”, dice su madre. “Pero después de un tiempo, me di cuenta que esto es lo que realmente les gusta hacer, así que ahora los animo”.

A pesar de sus recientes logros, Sati Santa Cruz Jr. No tiene intención de detenerse.

Él comenta que su meta principal para la próxima temporada es ayudarse a sí mismo y a su equipo a mejorar y ganar el campeonato estatal. Su meta es 90 ponches y un promedio de carreras limpias permitidas de 1.0 o menos.

También menciona que le emociona lo que depara el futuro para él. “Definitivamente estudiaré en la Universidad de Arizona. Es imprescindible”. Después de terminar en la Universidad de Arizona, tiene en mente ser seleccionado para entrar en el Béisbol de Ligas Mayores.

Además de sus padres, le agradece a “Dios por todas las bendiciones que me ha dado”, expresa. “También le quiero agradecer a mis

“Todos los jóvenes lo admiran”, dice su padre. Él ha sido un líder desde la escuela primaria.”

-Sati Santa Cruz Sr.



Santa Cruz es un 'gigante' en el bateo según su entrenador Sam Gelardi.



Tomatoes wait to be sold at the Market on the Move at Santa Catalina Catholic Church.

Photos by Ashlie Stewart

By Ashlie Stewart

Market on the Move, a program devoted to saving food and feeding people, is attracting more customers than ever.

But it isn't just the markets' red Roma tomatoes and crispy bell peppers that draw people in. The unique goals and values of the program are what truly set it apart.

For only a \$10 donation, anyone can go to a market and take home up to 60 pounds of produce. Although the markets' locations and variety of produce varies weekly, the price remains the same.

One of the main goals of Market on the Move is to avoid wasting any food. The program's founders started the markets with just a few loads of watermelon. Today, truckloads of produce are picked up each week. Most of it is rescued from Mexico.

“Nothing is wasted,” said Sister Jean, the director of social concerns at the Santa Catalina Catholic Church. “When we hold a market everything that is not moved through the process is taken to the Community Food Bank, and anything that is squished is donated to farmers and gardeners for mulch.”

Customers who attend the markets are encouraged to share the produce with neighbors or friends in need. For many people, picking up the produce and dispersing it is a community experience.

“The goal of the program is to get food into

the hands of hungry people, and we continue to feed more people each and every month,” said Mark Pincus, the site director of the Santa Catalina Catholic Church market.

And according to the founder of Market on the Move, Lon Taylor, people from all different walks of life attend the markets.

“We have a wide variety of people at all different income levels,” Taylor said. “It's a slice of American pie.”

But why do the markets move? According to Taylor they move so that the discounted produce can reach more people. “We try to spread out as much as possible.”

Every Saturday there are markets held at five to six locations around town from November to April, and intermittently throughout the year. The locations move each week based on requests from different host organizations, and all sites are chosen based solely on those requests.

Just recently, a new program started in Tucson so people can attend a Market on the Move mid-week if they aren't able to attend a Saturday function. The Wednesday market is located at the 3000 Club Tucson warehouse.

The 3000 Club is a non-profit organization out of Phoenix that started the Market on the Move program about three years ago. The organization's mission statement is, “Providing life-saving fruits and vegetables to impoverished families.”

Market on the Move is only one aspect of their charitable initiatives, but it continues to draw more customers and reach more people each year.

Sister Jean said that the market at Santa Catalina Catholic Church has progressed from about 250 to almost 600 visitors since she first started hosting the program about a year and a half ago. She believes advertisement and word of mouth has helped spread the news.

“There has been lots of advertising and fliers up at stores,” Sister Jean said. “I even take some fliers to Curves when I go to work out.”

According to Taylor, the future looks bright for Market on the Move. New programs like the MOM-Express program and the Mega Marketplace are sprouting up in Phoenix, and there is talk of expansion in Tucson as well.

“There is still more produce to be rescued,” Taylor said. “And our goal is to eventually spread to as many communities as possible.”



Market on the Move volunteers disperse produce.

SUNNYSIDE HIGH

Helps Pregnant, Parenting Teens Graduate

By Caitlin Schmidt

Years ago, Tucson High School student Monica Luna found herself 16 and pregnant.

She attended the Teenage Parent Program at her school, and with their help, she was able to graduate, even finishing high school a semester early.

Now, decades later, Luna is familiar with a situation that a number of high school students are facing today, and she's using her experience to help make a difference in Sunnyside Unified School District.

Sunnyside's Teenage Parent Program (TAPP), through a longstanding partnership between El Rio Community Health Center and Sunnyside High School, aims to increase graduation rates and provide support to pregnant teens. TAPP is separate from the Tucson Unified School District's Teenage Parent Program.

"The number one reason that girls drop out of high school is because they become pregnant," said Jodi Liggett, director of public policy for Planned Parenthood of Arizona.

"The majority of these girls are doing OK in school before they drop out," she said. "The combination of a young mother without a high school diploma is a recipe for poverty."

Arizona ranks sixth in the U.S. for teen pregnancy and fourth in high school dropouts, according to a 2013 study by the Guttmacher Institute.

The only program of its kind in Tucson, TAPP provides educational, social and health support for pregnant and parenting students throughout their time spent in high school.

All services are provided on site to allow participants to maintain a more traditional high school schedule and experience. Other programs in Tucson Unified and Marana have separate schools for their pregnant teens.

Barb Novak, TAPP's health coordinator and certified nurse midwife with El Rio Community Health Center, has been with the program since its inception in 1993.

"This program is the most comprehensive and most effective of its kind," she said. "We see fewer dropouts and more healthy pregnancies."

On the Sunnyside High School campus, students in the TAPP program have access to a pregnancy coordinator, educational and social support, nursing care and other resources. Novak also connects students to services such as pregnancy tests, birth control and emergency contraception.

"Our goal is to do what we can to help teens be more confident in decision making overall," Novak said. "But also with future decisions regarding pregnancy, parenting and reproductive health."

Sunnyside and the Pima County Health Department also have a mobile teen clinic on site at the school once a week to discreetly provide services to students who might not otherwise visit the TAPP office or see a physician.

"For a person who likes working with teens, this is a dream place to be," Novak said. "I'm in their lives every day."

Tracy Pitts, another influential leader of TAPP, has served as case manager since 1999. She helps the students through every aspect of their pregnancy – arranging health coverage, providing emotional or

crisis support, helping students who might be struggling academically and providing college and career services.

"I know every intimate detail of these students' lives," Pitts said. "Some are guarded, depending on their background. It takes time to earn their trust."

One of the educational tools TAPP utilizes is the "Baby Think It Over" doll. The computerized baby requires students to care for it as they would a real infant. It cries when it needs to be fed, changed or burped and will do so several times a day to give the students a realistic impression of what caring for a baby may be like.

TAPP also encourages the fathers to be involved in the process, whether or not the couple is still together.

"We have six dads enrolled right now," Pitts said. "That's a record. They're very involved and active in absorbing the information."

Although Sunnyside offers what is called Family Life Education as a part of their regular health class, it is not a comprehensive form of sex education. Rather, it employs the abstinence-only approach, which does not include any education about contraception.

By contrast, TAPP students take a course in prenatal care and another in parenting, and receive credit for these classes. According to Pitts, the goal is to get these students through a healthy pregnancy and ensure their successful graduation.

As an added benefit for the students in TAPP, Sunnyside has a state licensed nursery on site for infants up to one year old. Girls in the program are encouraged to return to school two weeks after their delivery if there are no complications for them or the baby.

The nursery services are free for most students through scholarships from First Things First, a state board that provides funding for programs that promote healthy child development. If the student doesn't qualify for a scholarship it costs \$3 per day. However, the parents in the program must maintain passing grades and attendance to use the nursery.

Two long-time nursery workers are assisted by CPR-certified student aids to care for the babies in an active environment. The parents are required to spend their lunches in the nursery – feeding and changing their babies while they eat their own food – to teach them time management.

Over the last five years, TAPP has averaged 148 participants per year. This includes males as well as females who are either pregnant and parenting. The program also provides preventative services for roughly 250 students per year.

Program coordinator Monica Luna, meanwhile, is involved in every stage of the operation: she teaches the prenatal and parenting classes, coordinates with other employees and works with homebound students who cannot return to school immediately after their delivery. She also has every Sunnyside TAPP student in her homeroom, guaranteeing constant contact.

"Fortunately, this is a well-oiled machine that I got dropped into," she said. "Prevention is our first goal in this program. If the student becomes pregnant, our goal turns into 'We need to get this individual graduated.'"

Luna openly shares her own teen pregnancy experience with her children, elaborating on what it's like to have a child while in school. When she was 18, even though she was using contraception, she

became pregnant with twins.

"I fell into those statistics that said if you're a teen parent, you will become pregnant again within two years," she said. "I freak the students out with that story."

She returned to school in her 30's to become a teacher after doing clerical work for the University of Arizona Medical Center for more than a decade.

"When I graduated, I applied to Sunnyside and TUSD to teach for the TAPP program because I knew it was the best thing that happened to me," Luna said. "I graduated a semester early because of it."

She didn't get the job at that time, and instead worked as a Spanish teacher for 11 years while also teaching parent education classes at the UA. She also worked as a doula, helping women give birth.

Through her work with the community, she taught a "healthy pregnancy" class at Sunnyside, where she met Novak. When the former TAPP director announced her retirement, Novak called Luna, who wasn't even looking for work at the time.

"This was my dream job," she said. "But I had to come full-circle and have that crazy experience to get here."

For her TAPP students, Luna brings in presenters to discuss things

such as the importance of vaccinations and post-partum depression. She said she accepts any speaker who is a specialist in a topic and can cover it on a deeper level than she can.

Sunnyside Unified School District also has TAPP programs available at Desert View High School and S.T.A.R. Academic Center, a school for students who learn best in non-traditional ways, need more time with teachers, or because of circumstances, are not able to regularly attend Desert View High School. Although both campuses have nurses on site, Pitts and Novak travel twice a week to Desert Vista and twice a month to

S.T.A.R. to provide services to students.

Currently, Sunnyside has 28 students who are pregnant or parenting. Desert View has 17 and S.T.A.R. has 29.

"At S.T.A.R., I'm looking to give them more attention because those students being in that alternative option are at their last chance to get this done," Luna said. "I think they're in the most need of information and support if they're pregnant or are parents."

Even though she said she thinks the program already runs effectively,

she still looks forward to implementing new ideas and – eventually – moving forward.

"I plan to retire from this position," Luna said, laughing. "But that's a long way off."

"If the student becomes pregnant, our goal turns into, 'We need to get this individual graduated.'"

— Monica Luna, Program Coordinator

"This program is the most comprehensive and most effective of its kind."

— Barb Novak, TAPP's health coordinator



Photo by Caitlin Schmidt

TAPP case manager Tracy Pitts (middle) shows two students how to use the Baby Think it Over computerized babies. The dolls require students to care for it as if it were a real baby, giving them a small glimpse of what parenting involves.



Diana Teran-Moreno's son, Jonathan, piles vegetables onto a customer's plate. It is the customer's first time visiting Mexico in Season.

Photos by Austin McEvoy

Local Restaurants Give Tips on Cooking *Healthy Mexican Food*

By Austin McEvoy

When many people think of Mexican food, they might imagine a greasy mountain of cheddar cheese and refried beans piled high atop a fried tortilla.

However, that isn't real Mexican food at all.

"The traditional Mexican menu is far from being unhealthy," says Diana Teran-Moreno, the owner of Mexico in Season, a health-conscious Mexican restaurant with vegan and vegetarian options that opened December 2013 in South Tucson. "The chimichanga doesn't even exist in Mexico."

Teran-Moreno, who was raised in Sonora, Mexico, incorporates authentic Mexican dishes from cactus stir fry to sizzling fajitas. "It was the crossing of cultures when Hispan-

ics came to the US in the '50s that led to all the fried stuff," she says. "Unfortunately, it's the younger generation that doesn't know this [traditional] food."

The first Mexican restaurant in Tucson to identify itself as health-conscious was El Saguarito, founded by Albert and Blanca Vasquez in 1989. Trademarked as "the healthy Mexican alternative," El Saguarito's menu includes gluten-free, vegan and "heart-friendly" dishes.

"We try to keep the authenticity of the food while also trying to make it as healthy as possible," Albert Vasquez says. "For example, we took out the lard from all the recipes to minimize the fat."

During Lent, a season of prayer in which most practicing Catholics do not eat meat on Fridays, the restaurant's most popular item

is its fish tacos, Vasquez says. Their variation is made with unbreaded basa fish, similar to catfish, and fresh vegetables served with a side of cilantro-ranch sauce instead of cheese.

Healthy dishes like these can also be made at home. Teran-Moreno and Vasquez offer the following tips and tricks for cooking healthy Mexican food in your own kitchen without sacrificing flavor.

Transform the Tortilla

Tortillas made with lard are not only loaded with calories but leave many people feeling bloated and uncomfortable. At El Saguarito, all tortillas are made with canola oil, which is a lighter source of fat with a "hint of nutty flavor," Vasquez says.

Substitutions like this leave customers feel-



A pot of seasoned chicken cooks in El Saguarito's kitchen. The restaurant only serves white meat.

ing light, as opposed to weighed down and lethargic after their meals, Vasquez says. "I prefer this food to the place across the street," says Joan Rosario, referencing another Mexican food restaurant. Rosario has been dining at El Saguarito regularly since it opened.

"They have the greasy stuff, but I like the food here better," she says of El Saguarito.

Another ingredient in the standard tortilla is flour, which is a source of refined carbohydrates, otherwise known as "white carbohydrates." This kind of carbohydrate is easily broken down by the body into its sugar monomers, providing quick energy. However, when eaten in excess without appropriate levels of exercise, the unused energy is stored as fat.

Eating too many of these kinds of simple carbohydrates can also lead to type 2 diabetes. Teran-Moreno, who also owns La Tauna Tortillas, recommends using corn or whole wheat instead. Cornmeal and whole wheat flour contain complex carbohydrates that take longer for the body to break down, resulting in a more sustained supply of energy.

"I especially like the whole-wheat tortillas," says customer Christina Barnum, who studies nutrition at the University of Arizona. "I hope more places with healthy options like this pop up in the area."

Eliminate Red Meat

Red meat is found in many popular Mexican dishes, like carne asada or beef burritos.

However, in addition to being high in saturated fat, red meat also contains L-carnitine, an amino acid that gut bacteria convert into a substance called trimethylamine-N-oxide, or TMAO. TMAO wreaks havoc in the body and

can lead to clogged arteries, according to a 2013 study published in the journal *Nature Medicine*.

For these reasons, none of Vasquez's recipes contain red meat. Instead he uses white meat, such as fish and chicken. Even his Sonoran hot dogs are made with turkey meat rather than beef.

Add Veggies

Adding vegetables to a recipe is a low-calorie way of increasing the nutrients in a meal.

Teran-Moreno says that while growing up in Mexico, vegetables were a big part of her diet.

"We don't miss out on flavor here ever," she says. "You are never cheated."

Her menu features vegetarian-friendly dishes like red chili potatoes and onion stir fry. The restaurant's most popular dish is her calabacitas, which she makes with zucchinis,

tomatoes, onions, poblano peppers and corn.

Vegetables can also be used in place of starchy carbohydrates, such as those found in tortillas. For those on low-carb diets, Vasquez recommends using a piece of romaine lettuce instead of a tortilla, which is an option he offers at his restaurant.

Limit Sugar

Almost twice as many Hispanics are diagnosed with type 2 diabetes each year compared to non-Hispanic Caucasians, according to the Centers for Disease Control.

The culprit? Sugar.

Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body's cells become resistant to the hormone insulin, which is necessary for transporting sugar from the blood to cells. For this reason, people with high sugar diets are more at risk for developing the disease.

You can limit your sugar intake with simple substitutions, like making margaritas with silver tequila instead of gold, Vasquez says.

Gold tequila is flavored with both agave nectar and caramel, he says. Silver tequila, on the other hand, is typically only made with agave nectar and consequently has a lower percentage of sugar and fewer calories.

"You get more alcohol for your money when you buy silver tequila," he added.

The amount of sugar in non-alcoholic drinks can also be reduced by using fruit as a natural sweetener instead of sugar additives, Teran-Moreno says.

Because many members of her own family have diabetes, Teran-Moreno does not sell any soft drinks at her restaurant, only water and homemade juices. One of her most popular juices is a watermelon concoction made with lime and cucumber.

"I truly believe that you are what you eat," she says. "Bad food can really hurt people."



A cook rings a bell in El Saguarito's kitchen, indicating a plate of food is ready for transport. Vasquez often delivers food to customers himself.

SPECIALIZED PROGRAM Helps Treat Hepatitis C



Ribavirin, an Alpha Interferon, has been used in conjunction with Interferon to treat Hepatitis C since the late 1980s, with severe and universal side effects. New treatments aim to reduce side effects and treatment times.

Photo by Caitlin Schmidt

By Caitlin Schmidt & Litzy Galarza

It took Dalia Baker five years to get treatment after she was diagnosed with Hepatitis C.

Now, a year after entering the Hepatitis C program at El Rio Community Health Center, she's finishing up treatment

"This is the toughest thing yet I've had to conquer," Baker said. "I'm so glad I looked into the program. I wouldn't have made it otherwise."

El Rio's bilingual Hepatitis C program works to improve the quality of care for

patients disproportionately affected by Hepatitis C (HCV), such as the uninsured and underinsured, through education and support. The population of participants in the program is about 89 percent Hispanic, similar to El Rio's patient demographic, which is roughly 75 percent Spanish speaking.

Program Director Dr. Scott Wilson said he realized there was a "significant prevalence" of HCV in the area when he started treating the condition in 2000. Wilson has two clinic days weekly dedicated to HCV patients, who he sees once a week. Although he doesn't

officially track the number of participants, he's seen more than 100 patients since the beginning of the year. As a doctor of internal medicine he also sees patients outside of the program on the other three days.

Karyl Williams, El Rio's integrative behavior health consultant, is also available for patients in the program for support with many of the emotional concerns associated with treatment. Finding support groups can be difficult, she said.

"Even with support groups, you can't hear it all yourself," Williams said. "There's so

Hepatitis C: What it is:

HCV is a contagious liver disease resulting from the blood born transmission and infection of the Hepatitis C Virus. Upon infection, a person can develop acute HCV, a short-term illness occurring within the first six months. Seventy-five to 85 percent of infected people develop chronic HCV. Over time, it can cause serious liver problems, such as cirrhosis, liver failure or liver cancer.

much and such comprehensive information. Everyone hears different things.

Williams counsels patients about anything they need, including side effects of their medications, depression and anxiety issues. She also helps patients cope with and avoid the stigma associated with HCV, which can be similar to those associated with HIV because both diseases are transmitted through blood and bodily fluids.

Hepatitis C is the most common chronic blood-borne infection in the United States, with approximately 4.1 million individuals infected, according to the Arizona HCV Reports.

In Arizona, it's estimated that more than 120,000 people are infected with the virus, half of who are unaware of their infection. It's also estimated that as many as 85,000 people will remain affected for life, according to the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS.)

ADHS receives 8,000 HCV-positive reports annually, but because of the lack of visible symptoms, most individuals don't discover they have the disease until 20 years after exposure.

Baker was diagnosed after she went to the doctor with a rigid, distended abdomen and a poor appetite. Prior to that, she had never experienced symptoms, so she had never been tested.

When the test came back positive, her doctor told her that she'd probably been infected many years ago.

"I thought, 'I went to checkups every year, why didn't anyone see this?'" Baker said. "Why isn't this test included?"

The disease is especially problematic for that very reason, Wilson said: it isn't a standardized test.

Due to Arizona's current economic situation, there is no longer state-funded Hepatitis testing, although there are a number of public facilities in Tucson that offer free or low-cost testing for HCV.

"It's being called 'the silent epidemic' because it's typically asymptomatic," Wilson said. "Things that you wouldn't recognize as being Hepatitis until it's too late."

When Baker was first diagnosed, the insurance her employer, Tucson Medical Center, carried required that she be put on a list to wait for treatment coverage.

"It's being called the 'silent epidemic' because it's typically asymptomatic. Things you wouldn't recognize as being Hepatitis until it's too late."

-Dr. Scott Wilson,
Program Director

"I was too sick to work," she said. "I couldn't do my job, and I wasn't getting treated."

Baker was eventually fired. After she was uninsured, she was told about El Rio's program and was able to receive treatment when she enrolled in AHCCCS.

The majority of El Rio's patients either have AHCCCS or are uninsured, according to Wilson. He explained that in the past, if a patient had no insurance, the pharmaceutical companies had programs to pay for the treatment.

A detriment to the drug therapy for Hepatitis C is severe and universal side effects that make it difficult for some patients to complete the yearlong treatment.

Enrollment Information

To enroll in El Rio's program, call the main appointment line at 670-3909 and specifically register for the Hepatitis C program.

Baker said that during the last three months of her treatment, she suffered from weight gain, hair loss and chronic fatigue.

At the beginning of the year two new drugs with less fewer effects and a three-month treatment time were approved by the FDA. With that shortened duration comes a substantial increase in cost

"For a three-month course, it's \$84,000. Kind of staggering," Wilson said. "Before, for a year's course, it would be between \$15,000 and \$20,000."

Since the cost has increased, the pharmaceutical companies have now been requiring patients to sign up for insurance through the Health Insurance Marketplace, Wilson said. Now that the deadline to sign up has passed its unclear what will happen for the people who are still uninsured, he said.

Through the Affordable Care Act, the state is going to have to decide how much of the treatment they can afford to pay for with AHCCCS.

Wilson is hopeful that with the shorter treatment times and less serious side effects, HCV will someday be eradicated.

"Success rates are approaching 100 percent. It's going to be if you take the treatment it's going to work over 95 percent," Wilson said.

As Baker struggles with the illness reaches an end, she is looking forward to relaxing and getting back to her normal life. Her plans for the future, though, are simple.

"I want to live at least another 30 years," she said.

How are Hepatitis A, B and C different:

Hepatitis A (HAV) is found in the feces of infected individuals, and is most commonly spread by eating contaminated food or drinking water, or by traveling internationally where HAV infection is occurring. A vaccination is available.

Hepatitis B (HBV) is found in blood and certain body fluids, and is transmitted to unvaccinated individuals by having unprotected sex with an infected person, sharing needles, exposure to needle sticks or from an infected mother to her baby during birth. A vaccination is also available for HBV.

Hepatitis C (HCV) has no vaccination currently available. It is also spread through sharing needles, needle sticks or passed on to the offspring off infected individuals. It's possible, but uncommon, to be transmitted through sex.

New Bike Club Pumps Kids Up

By Hollie Dowdle

Students without transportation in the South Tucson community may no longer be stranded thanks to a new club at the John A. Valenzuela Youth Center.

Children in the club can earn one of 25 bikes given to the youth center by the South Tucson Police Department a few months ago, according to Jessica Alderete, the program coordinator and 11-year employee of the center. The bikes had either been stolen or abandoned and were recovered by police in the South Tucson area.

Although the recovered bikes were damaged, Alderete and co-worker Chuck Peralta suggested they be used to start a bike club. Students could refurbish the bikes and take them home once they were fixed.

"This program gives our kids ways to gain knowledge," she said. "It helps them figure out their role and how to stand up for things. It's a great way for them to learn about how to make good choices from their peers and not just their parents."

Eight or nine students usually attend the bike club meetings on Thursday and Friday evenings. Alderete said because the likelihood of kids getting into trouble increases at night, parents can rest knowing their kids are doing something productive at the center. She added that Chuck Peralta, a recreational aide at the center and the teacher for the club, increased this sense of safety and involvement.

"Chuck is the neighborhood Dad," Alderete said. "A lot of these kids don't have fathers. But he has the tools and helps them learn."

Peralta has worked at the center for 17 years and said the bike club builds confidence in the kids who visit.

"The kids have an opportunity to take ownership of something they built with their own two hands," Peralta said. "Since they made it, they want to take care of it."

He believes this confidence transfers to other areas of their lives, such as their schoolwork and friendships.

"They prove to themselves they have the talents and skills to apply themselves to anything they want," he said.

The program holds special significance for Peralta, who said he appreciates working at the center because he gets to give kids what he didn't have when he was growing up.

"I worked on bikes when I was small, and I remember when I didn't have my own bike and all my friends did," he said. "When this opportunity arose, I realized it was a great way to give them what I wished I had."



Photo by Hollie Dowdle

Seventh grader Ricardo Tovar works on a bike at the John A. Valenzuela Youth Center.

Ricardo Tovar, a seventh-grade student at Safford Middle School, attended the bike club for three weeks. He got to claim his own bike after fixing it himself.

"I was so excited to take it home because I had been fixing it for a while," he said.

Tovar uses the bike to ride to school, which he said is helpful when his mom is too busy to take him.

Tovar isn't the only neighborhood kid to benefit from the services offered at the John A. Valenzuela Youth Center. All seven of the center's staff members are past participants of various programs.

Named after South Tucson Police Officer John Valenzuela, the youth center offers free after-school, drop-in recreational and educational programs Monday through Friday for community youth. The 150 participating elementary students can access classes ranging from arts and crafts, to Folklorico dancing, to cooking and sports. In addition, middle and high school students can play on a basketball team, take wood burning or cooking classes, or participate in the new bike club.

Keyla Ramirez, a recreational aide, said she doesn't know where she would be without the center.

"My favorite part is the meaningful history that I have here," she said. "I started coming here because of family problems at home, and it helped me because I could talk to the staff members."

Just as those staff members helped her through tough times, Ramirez, as well as Alderete and Peralta, wants to be there for students who need someone to talk to.

"We just want them to live successful lives," Peralta said.

El Rio Health Center

Provides Specialized Care, Free Diabetes Education



Photos by Caitlin Schmidt

El Rio Community Health Center dietitian Leticia Martinez counsels patient Marta Eagle during a diabetes education class on a recent Monday.

By Caitlin Schmidt

Marta Eagle's family history of diabetes began when her mother and brother were both diagnosed years ago.

Eagle herself was diagnosed only three months ago, but through a program offered at El Rio Community Health Center, she has access to education, counseling and collaborative care her family never had.

Sembrando Nuestro Mañana, or "Sowing Our Tomorrow" is a bilingual diabetes education and nutrition counseling program offered by the health center that tailors a health plan to fit each patient's needs. A registered dietitian acts as program manager and works with each patient through follow-up visits to ensure their diabetes is controlled. The patient also sees a clinical pharmacist to ensure he or she

receives the correct medication and dosage for his or her specific treatment plan.

Leticia Martinez is the diabetes educator and registered dietitian for Sembrando Nuestro Mañana. She has been an employee of El Rio for 18 years. Nutrition counseling can be beneficial for all patients enrolled in the program, she said, and often makes a significant impact.

"I've made quite a bit of changes to my diet [since my diagnosis]," Eagle said. "I've had to limit the amount of fruit that I eat, which is hard."

Martinez explains in her classes the impact that food has on a person's blood sugar. Since beginning counseling, Eagle has also switched from corn to flour tortillas and has been complication-free.

A 2011 study by the Arizona Department of Health Services found that 8.9 percent of

Arizona's population, or 489,000 people, are diagnosed diabetics. That indicates an 80 percent increase from 1995, when only 4 percent of the population suffered from diabetes. The study also estimates that since a third of the population is undiagnosed, the real figure may be closer to 600,000 adults with diabetes in Arizona.

As the program's only dietitian, Martinez meets with six to eight patients a day Monday through Friday for 30-minute appointments.

"I see patients on a one-to-one basis when they first begin the program," Martinez said. She follows up with patients whose blood sugar is out of control or people who need more nutritional counseling.

She also follows up with her patients' physicians to adjust medications as necessary and continues counseling patients if they need it.

As the diabetes educator for El Rio, she

DIABETES — WHAT IT IS

Diabetes is a chronic disease characterized by high blood sugar due to a lack of insulin, the blood sugar regulating hormone produced by the body. Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disorder where the body does not produce insulin. Its causes are not entirely understood, but scientists believe that both genes and environment are factors.

By comparison, Type 2 diabetes occurs when the body either does not produce enough insulin or the body's cells ignore the insulin that is produced. There is a genetic connection with Type 2 diabetes, but lifestyle and obesity are strong risk factors for the disease. Type 2 diabetes usually occurs in adults, while Type 1 is most commonly diagnosed in children.

The kids have an opportunity to take ownership of something they built with their own two hands." — Chuck Peralta



El Rio Community Health Center dietician Leticia Martinez counsels patient Marta Eagle.

management of these services and increasing positive patient outcomes have also been accomplished since the program's inception. Some patients see their primary care physician for a variety of health needs, including diabetes. Through El Rio's program, a patient's diabetes care is managed by the dietician and pharmacists who communicate with the primary care physician. The patient receives focused treatment for their diabetes, something that might not get as much attention if the patient has other health problems that need to be addressed by their physician.

"We have worked with over 3,500 patients with diabetes," said Dr. Sandra Leal, Director of Clinical Pharmacy at El Rio's Broadway location.

Legislation passed in 2005 changed Arizona law to allow pharmacists in settings such as community health centers to implement, monitor and modify drug therapy while collaborating with physicians.

Shortly after the change in law, Leal, the other clinical pharmacist at El Rio and the medical team determined together that a diabetes-focused management clinic would serve the needs of the center's patients. El Rio serves a large population of Tucson's diabetic and pre-diabetic patients as well as genetically high-risk populations, such as Hispanics and Native American patients. Pre-diabetes means that the body is producing less insulin or becoming resistant to it. With exercise, medication and changes to one's diet, it's possible that one with pre-diabetes will never develop Type 1 or 2 diabetes.

El Rio's Clinical Pharmacy Consultation Service that works in conjunction with the University of Arizona College of Medicine specifically services diabetic patients, 62 percent of whom are at or below the poverty line. Thirty-five percent of those patients are under 14 years old.

With Arizona being 10th in the nation for obesity, pre-diabetes has also become a growing problem in the past decade. The number of adults with Type 2 diabetes has doubled in the past 10 years.

"Some of the increase is related to the fact that we are doing earlier screening," Martinez said. "On the other hand, our lifestyles play a significant role in the increase of diabetes."

More obese people are being diagnosed at earlier ages, including children and teenagers. "Diabetes is preventable, and we must eat healthier," Martinez said.

Her patient, Eagle, is sharing with her family the education she is receiving through El Rio and lifestyle changes she has made.

"When my mother was diagnosed many years ago, she received no education," Eagle said. "This would have helped her."

Drop Boxes Aim to Reduce Drug Abuse

Get rid of unwanted prescription drugs or over-the-counter medicine through drop boxes

By Ashley Powell

Tucson residents can dispose of unwanted prescription drugs or over-the-counter medicine through drop boxes around the city. In October, the Pima County-Tucson Commission on Addiction Prevention and Treatment, along with four other community coalitions, announced the availability of five drop boxes, one at each of the Tucson Police Department stations.

Within one month of the announcement, more than 100 pounds of medications were collected, "removing these prescription drugs from the potential misuse by teens," according to Amy Bass, project director and prevention director for the Pima County Prevention Coalition of Compass- SAMHC Behavioral Healthcare.

Currently, all five drop boxes have collected of more than 300 pounds of disposed prescription medications, said Lieutenant Mike Pryor, a member of the Community Prevention Coalition Steering Committee and Pima County-Tucson Commission on Addiction Prevention and Treatment.

The southside dropbox location collected the least, with about 39 pounds, while the midtown box has collected the most with about 105 pounds of medications.

Prescription drug use is a continuous problem in Pima County, Bass said. In the county, about 8 percent of youth in grades eight, 10 and 12 reported prescription medication use in the past 30 days for non-prescribed purposes in 2012, according to the Arizona Youth Survey.

In addition to the commission, the Community Prevention Coalition, Amistades Incorporated and 29th Street 4 R Communities received a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration while also contributing \$1,000 each to help pay for the permanent drop boxes, Bass said.

Pryor led the effort gaining support from the Tucson Police Department



Photo Illustration by Ryan Revock

MedReturn units are located at four police stations across Tucson: 4410 S. Park Ave., 1310 W. Miracle Mile, 1100 S. Alvernon Way and 9670 E. Golf Links Road.

and another coalition, Luz Southside.

"Sometimes when you're doing something as a group, and then someone steps out and takes the lead, that's what the commission did—stepped up and took the lead," Bass said.

Tucsonans can dispose of any medications other than liquids and sharp objects like needles. To get rid of liquids, community members can attend regular take-back events held by the Community Prevention Coalition throughout the city. Sharp objects can be disposed at home under precautions found online at sites like safeneedledisposal.org, according to the Tucson Police Department.

The Community Prevention Coalition also aims to raise awareness about the potential harm medications have on the city's water supply. If not disposed of properly, drugs can contaminate the water supply and traces of the medications can show up in the drinking water, according to a Be RXSafe press release.

Right now the drop boxes are only available within the City of Tucson. Bass explained that they are not found in sheriff offices, because no one is there to continually operate the front desk and monitor incoming drugs.

IF YOU GO

What: Bilingual Diabetes Education Classes

When: English class,
Monday 10:00 to 11:30 a.m.
Spanish class,
Thursday 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.

Where: El Rio Community Health Center Congress Clinic,
839 W. Congress Street

Cost: Free

Series of four classes that repeat every month:

- Understanding Diabetes
- Diabetes Nutrition
- Medications and Maintaining a Healthy Blood Pressure and Blood Sugar
- Prevention of Complications and Exercise

For more information,
call 670-3909



The Don of Taqueria Pico de Gallo

Don Nacho serves a customer at his restaurant, Taqueria Pico de Gallo, during a Friday lunch.

Photos by Austin McEvoy

By Scarlett McCourt

When Ignacio Delgado, better known as Don Nacho, was a kid, his mother owned a small store in Tetalan, Mexico.

One morning, she sent Nacho to buy a crate of oranges. She instructed him to slice the oranges, season them with salt and chile and by 11 a.m., start selling them.

“She asked me, ‘How much did you pay for the oranges?’” Nacho says. “I said \$4. She said, ‘Okay, I want you to make \$40.’”

Nacho was successful in selling his orange slices, and soon enough his products shifted from oranges to jicamas, to coconuts, to watermelons, to sugar canes and eventually to bikes he repaired and rented out by the hour. Nacho was 9 years old.

Today, he is the successful owner of Taqueria Pico de Gallo, 2618 S. Sixth Ave.

But the road to successful entrepreneurship didn’t always come as easily as it did at his fruit stand in Mexico.

As an adult, Nacho worked as a mechanic for 15 years in the United States and was making good money—\$18 per hour—but it was always his dream to own his own pushcart to sell pico de gallo. It wasn’t your typical tomato, onion and cilantro pico de gallo that Tucsonans know and love: traditional Mexican pico de gallo consists of fruit instead. Nacho’s had chunks of coconut, watermelon, pineapple, mango and jicama seasoned with chili powder and salt.

Not everyone understood his dream of owning a pushcart, however.

“I used to think, ‘What is this?’ The concept of a pushcart—I had only seen it in Mexico,” Nacho’s son, Adan Delgado says. “But here in the United States I was like, ‘This is weird, Dad. This is weird.’ But he was pretty stubborn—that was what he wanted to do.”

Even though his son thought the dream was strange, Nacho quit his mechanic job and bought a carrito.

His late wife, Antonia, was not pleased.

“She said, ‘You’re stupid! You’re 40 years old.

You’re leaving your job for nothing,’” Nacho says. “She told me to get out of the house.”

But Nacho was determined, and spent months going back and forth with the health department, fighting for a permit. He spent thousands of dollars to have the stainless steel cart built and even added-on a kitchen in the back of his house to prepare the food.

Once the health department finally granted Nacho a permit, he immediately started selling his pico de gallo on the streets of southern Tucson.

On the first day he worked from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. He made \$4.

“I went home tired, and I just said ‘Well, tomorrow is going to be better,’” Nacho says.

It didn’t. Within the first two months, the most Nacho made in a day was \$18.

One night, Nacho came home and Antonia was angry.

“My wife was waiting for me at 10 o’clock at night and she said, ‘You remember when I told you to get out of here? Do it now. The door is closed for you,’” Nacho says.

He spent that night sleeping in his kitchen.



Fried fish sits ready for tacos during lunch time.

Eventually, the school year started and business picked up. Nacho said students would ask their parents for pico de gallo, and he found himself selling out of food early in the morning. He added horchata and elote to his menu, per the students’ requests.

After his success with the carrito, he earned back the support and respect of Antonia.

Together they upgraded and bought a restaurant. Taqueria Pico De Gallo started small,

with only two rooms. The nacho-cheese-yellow building has since doubled in size to accommodate more customers, especially at lunch time. Inside, a collage of family photos brings an intimate touch.

The menu is simple: tacos. Cabeza, fish, birria, chicken, shrimp—there’s a taco for everyone. To wash down the tacos are homemade horchata and agua fresca. And of course the menu wouldn’t be complete

without Nacho’s unique pico de gallo.

Nacho is a successful business owner but he looks like an average abuelito—patches of grey hair, glasses and simple clothing. He is a humble man and is known for his generosity.

He donated particularly to Centro Cristiano Carismatico, a church across the street from the restaurant.

“He would literally take his shirt off his back to give to someone in need,” says Juan Ciscomani, director of the children’s center at the church. This generosity, Ciscomani says, gives Nacho a strong presence in the South Tucson community.

“Within that city, he’s well respected,” Ciscomani says. “He not only supports the efforts of our church but for baseball teams. Whoever asks he gives it.”

Today, Taqueria Pico de Gallo is making a profit. But Nacho still works the cash register and chops fruit in the kitchen.

“He has an old workhorse mentality,” his son, Delgado, says. “He’s from the old, old school.”

Nacho is 70 and still comes to the restaurant every day at 9 a.m. to prep for the lunch rush.

“I retired once,” Nacho said. “I was at home watching TV and I felt sick. I felt like everything hurt. So I called my doctor and he told me to go to the restaurant. He said, ‘Call me in a week if you still feel sick,’” Nacho said.

He went back to work, and hasn’t felt sick since.



Pico de gallo waits for customers during lunch hour.

El Don de la Taquería Pico de Gallo



Una empleada en Taquería Pico de Gallo pica pollo para tacos.

Fotos por Austin McEvoy

Escrito por Scarlett McCourt y traducido por Rennier Ballesteros

Cuando Ignacio Delgado, mejor conocido como Don Nacho, era un niño, su madre tenía una pequeña tienda en Tetitlán, México.

Una mañana, ella mandó a Nacho a comprar una caja de naranjas. Le dio instrucciones de cortar las naranjas, sazonalas con sal y chile para que a las 11 de la mañana empezara a venderlas.

"Ella me preguntó, '¿Cuánto pagaste por las naranjas?'" dijo Nacho. "Yo dije \$4. Ella me dijo, 'Esta bien, quiero que le ganes \$40.'"

Nacho tuvo éxito vendiendo las rebanadas de naranjas y en poco tiempo sus productos cambiaron de naranjas a jícamas, a cocos, a sandías, a cañas y eventualmente a bicicletas que el reparaba y rentaba por hora.

Nacho tenía 9 años.

Ahora él es el exitoso dueño de la Taquería Pico de Gallo en 2618 S. Sixth Ave.

Pero el camino al éxito empresarial no siempre fue fácil como lo fue en el puesto de frutas en México.

De adulto, Nacho trabajó de mecánico durante 15 años en los Estados Unidos y estaba ganando buen dinero, 18 dólares por hora, pero siempre fue su sueño ser el dueño de un carrito para vender pico de gallo. No era el típico pico de gallo con tomate, cebolla y cilantro que los Tucsonenses conocen y aman, sino el pico de gallo tradicional mexicano que consiste de frutas. Los pico de gallo de Nacho tienen pedazos de coco, sandía, piña, mango y jícama sazonado con sal y chile en polvo.

Pero no todos entendían su sueño de tener un carrito de frutas.

"Antes pensaba, '¿Qué es esto?' El concepto de un carrito de frutas – sólo

lo había visto en México", dijo el hijo de Nacho, Adan Delgado. "Pero aquí en los Estados Unidos, 'esto es raro papá. Esto es raro'. Pero él estaba terco en quererlo hacer."

A pesar de que su hijo pensaba que era un sueño extraño, Nacho renunció a su trabajo de mecánico y compró un 'carrito'.

Su esposa, Antonia, no estaba contenta.

"Ella dijo, '¡Estás tonto! Tienes 40 años. Estas dejando tu trabajo por nada,'" dijo Nacho. "Ella me dijo que me fuera de la casa".

Pero Nacho estaba determinado, y paso varios meses luchando con el departamento de salud para obtener un permiso. Gasto miles de dólares para que le hicieran un carrito de acero inoxidable y hasta agregó una cocina en la parte de atrás de su casa para preparar la comida.

Cuando el departamento de salud finalmente le otorgó el permiso a Nacho, él inmediatamente empezó a vender pico de gallo en las calles del sur de Tucson.

El primer día trabajó de 9 de la mañana hasta las 5 de la tarde. Ganó \$4.

"Regresé a casa cansado, y sólo dije 'Pues, mañana será mejor,'" dijo Nacho. No fue así. Dentro de dos meses lo más que Nacho ganó en un día fue \$18.

Una noche, Nacho llegó a casa y Antonia estaba enojada.

"Mi esposa me estaba esperando a las diez de la noche en punto y me dijo, '¿Recuerdas cuando te dije que te fueras de aquí? Hazlo ya. Las puertas están cerradas para ti,'" dijo Nacho.

Esa noche la pasó en su cocina.

Eventualmente, el año escolar inició y el negocio mejoró. Nacho explicó que los estudiantes les pedían a sus padres pico de gallo y a causa de eso se le acaba la comida por las mañanas. Debido a las peticiones de los estudiantes,

él agregó horchata y elote a su menú.

Después del éxito con su 'carrito', se ganó el apoyo y respeto de Antonia una vez más y juntos compraron un restaurante.

Taquería Pico de Gallo comenzó pequeña, con sólo dos cuartos. Desde entonces el edificio amarillo aumentó su tamaño el doble para alojar a los clientes, especialmente durante la hora del almuerzo. En el interior, una recopilación de fotos familiares le da un toque íntimo.

El menú es simple: tacos de cabeza, pescado, birria, pollo, camarón, hay un taco para todos. Para acompañar los tacos hay horchata y aguas frescas caseras. Y por supuesto el menú no estuviera completo sin la especialidad de Nacho, el pico de gallo.

Nacho es un propietario exitoso pero parece un abuelito normal con mechones de cabello blanco, lentes, y ropa sencilla. Él es un hombre humilde y se le conoce por su generosidad.

En particular, él hace donativos al Centro Cristiano Carismático, una iglesia enfrente del restaurante.

"Él literalmente se quitaría la camisa para dársela a alguien que la necesite", dijo Juan Ciscomani, el director del centro de niños en la iglesia. Esta generosidad, según Ciscomani, le da a Nacho una fuerte presencia en la comunidad del sur de Tucson.

"Dentro de esa ciudad, él es muy respetado", dijo Ciscomani. "Él no solamente apoyó los esfuerzos de nuestra iglesia pero también a los equipos de béisbol. Al que pida él le da".

Hoy en día, Taquería Pico de Gallo está creando ganancias. Pero Nacho aún trabaja en la caja registradora y corta la fruta en la cocina.

"Tiene una mentalidad de caballo de batalla", dijo su hijo, Delgado. "Él está criado a la antigua."

Nacho tiene 70 años y todavía viene al restaurante todos los días a las 9 de la mañana para prepararse para el almuerzo.

"Ya me retire una vez", dijo Nacho. "Estaba en casa mirando televisión y me sentía enfermo. Sentía como que todo me dolía. Entonces le marqué a mi doctor y me dijo que fuera al restaurante. Él me dijo, 'Márqueme en una semana si aún se siente enfermo'", explicó Nacho.

Él volvió a trabajar y desde entonces no se ha vuelto sentir enfermo.



Derecha: Don Nacho sonríe después de tomar la orden de un cliente en Taquería Pico De Gallo.

Abajo: Limones, cebolla, salsa y repollo son algunos de los ingredientes para acompañar los tacos.





Photos by Austin McEvoy

A painted tree decorated with student artwork stretches across a wall in Cyndee Wing's classroom. Wing said that she tries to incorporate at least one art activity into each day's lesson plan.

Autism Program Blossoms at Special Needs School

By Austin McEvoy

On the wall of a very special classroom hangs a piece of red construction paper embossed with the words, "Each of us is a flower growing in life's garden."

Surrounding the message are the photos of children with autism who attend one of Tucson's special needs schools.

The autism program at Intermountain Centers for Human Development, which began taking shape early in the 2013 school year, has garnered the attention of many parents within the special needs community.

Autism spectrum disorder now affects one

in 68 children in the United States, according to an estimate released by the Centers for Disease Control in late March.

"This is an opportunity for Robert to grow through adolescence without being teased and taunted like he would be in a regular school," said Karen Barela, grandmother of Robert Barela, an 11-year-old with a dual diagnosis of autism and seizure disorder.

Originally located in South Tucson, the school had an enrollment of only 12 students, none of whom had autism.

Since moving to its new location just south of Broadway Boulevard this school year, the number of students with autism enrolled at the

school has increased from four to 23, which makes up 50 percent of the school's total enrollment of 46 students, Education Director Tyson Gillespie said.

The school serves children from across Pima County.

Out of all the parents who seek Intermountain for services, parents of children with autism are doing so at a faster rate, Gillespie said. He thinks that one of the reasons for this influx is the work of the school's lead autism teacher Cyndee Wing, who also works as a behavioral health analyst.

At the foundation of Wing's autism curriculum is an emphasis on "functional skills,"



A student with autism plays with a toy register. Intermountain emphasizes the importance of math skills by rewarding students "bear bucks," which they can use to buy prizes.

which means not only teaching the students academics but life skills as well.

One way Wing manifests this ideology is by encouraging her students to help tend to a small garden just outside the classroom.

The elevated rectangular box is blanketed with mahogany-colored soil. The leaves of a basil plant cascade over a menagerie of small sprouts just beginning to peek out from the soil.

Inside the classroom, there is a full-size kitchen where students learn to cook their own meals. For student birthdays, the class bakes a cake together.

Down the hall, which encompasses the school in a circular fashion, is an indoor pool. This amenity is especially useful for children with autism because it is a way for them to ex-

ercise with positive sensory input, Wing said.

Although the students do not get to swim everyday, they do participate daily in a specially designed physical education class which takes place in a large multi-purpose room located in the center of the school.

The class begins as the children form a circle to stretch. Some look competitively at their neighbors and then dive closer toward their own toes, while others wander away from the group.

"There's a little bit of chaos sometimes," Wing said. "But that's what life is like."

This "chaos" is why children with autism often get left out of group activities at public schools, Wing said.

"People come here because they are looking for a solution for kids who were on the sidelines

at their old schools," Wing said. "There are other options in Tucson but none to this scale."

However, this kind of special instruction comes at a price. Tuition for a child with autism ranges from \$26,000 to \$30,000 for one school year, while rates for children without autism which range from \$15,000 to \$20,000, Gillespie said.

Tuition is more expensive for students with autism because they often require more individualized attention, like the assistance of a personal aide who works with the child in addition to his or her regular teacher.

Gillespie said that low-income families should not be discouraged from applying because there are scholarships available. About 90 to 95 percent of the school's current students come from low-income families, he said.

The tuition money not only helps pay the salaries of the school's staff members, but also allows the students to go on field trips throughout the year.

Decorating the wall leading to Wing's classroom is a collection of paper cacti peppered with hand-drawn spines, created after an adventure to Sabino Canyon.

Like most of the group activities, trips like this do not come without hiccups. Extra sets of hands are often required, Wing said.

"These kids are able to do things they wouldn't be able to do at other schools because of safety concerns," Gillespie said. "However, since we have a support staff in place they are able to do some really great hands-on learning."

Even at the end of a hard day, Wing said that the reward of enriching her students' lives is worth the bumps and bruises she has encountered along the way.

The message on the red construction paper hanging in her classroom offers the following reminder: "Each of us is a flower. We need the sun and the rain."

How to Apply

Typically, the public school that the student currently attends must make a referral in order for the student to transfer to Intermountain. When that happens, the public school is responsible for paying part of the student's tuition if the family cannot afford it.

If the student's public school refuses to make a referral and the parents still want their child to attend Intermountain, they can request a private enrollment.

The following scholarships are available:

- Institute for Better Education Corporate Scholarship
- Arizona Leadership Foundation Corporate Scholarship
- Disabled/Displaced Student Scholarship

*Application forms can be found at <http://www.ichd.net/>

About Intermountain

Originally founded in Tucson in 1973, under the name of the Southwest Indian Youth Center, Intermountain Center for Human Development has since expanded its services to include:

- Group Homes
- Foster Care
- Day Programs
- Schools for Special Needs Children

The goal of the organization is "to assist each child, adult and family individually, in identifying and achieving their personal goals through the least restrictive and most positive means."

For more information, visit their website at <http://www.ichd.net/> or call (520) 721-1887.



Photos by Ryan Revock
Jason Barragan tosses a tortilla to the next station to continue preparation.

Anita Street Market Does Chorizo Right

By Heidi Jaenicke

When was the last time you craved lymph nodes and salivary glands for breakfast? If you've eaten a mass-produced chorizo brand there is a good chance you've dined on these ingredients.

However, Anita Street Market serves fresh chorizo without any added (and suspect) pork products.

The term chorizo originates from Spain and is used to describe a specific type of sausage. Spanish chorizo consists of ground pork loin, pork fat and Spanish spices and is generally salted, cured and sliced. Mexican-style chorizo is typically ground with pork loin, pork fat and Mexican chili spices and cooks up similar to ground beef.

Over the years, ingredients such as salivary glands, lymph nodes and textured soy flour have been introduced into most store-brand recipes. These recipes replace pork loin for cheaper cuts of the pig, which decreases flavor and creates an unauthentic variety of chorizo.

The homemade chorizo at Anita Street Market distinguishes itself from other store brands and restaurant marketplaces in Tucson.

"I try to make the best," owner Grace Soto says. "Every day I hear something people ask and I try to make it."

Located off Speedway and I-10 at 849 N.

Anita Ave., Soto and her late husband started the business more than 13 years ago. The chorizo, however, isn't the company's only specialty.

The Food Conspiracy Co-op, located on 4th Avenue, sells a variety of Anita Street Market products including whole wheat and corn tortillas and gorditas. The tortillas are in high demand, and continuously draw positive customer feedback, according to Anthony Wallent, an employee at the co-op.

"People ask specifically for those tortillas," Wallent says.

"They just fly off the shelves."

Soto sells her chorizo and tortillas to other businesses but likes to keep it local. Her customers include Cup Café at Hotel Congress in addition to the co-op. Soto resides in the same neighborhood as the market, and says she is proud to provide her community with quality Mexican cuisine.

"My husband started with the tortillas and then I started making tortillas," Soto says. She now shares her tortilla-making skills with children in the neighborhood, including students at Davis Bilingual Elementary Magnet School. By allowing the children to watch the food being prepared, Soto teaches future generations about simple cooking. This interactive involvement allows students to appreciate the time, labor and individual ingredients that

quality food requires.

After the death of her husband, Soto wasn't sure if she wanted to continue working.

"When I go home I feel bad, but when I'm here I talk to a lot of people and then I don't feel bad," she says.

"So I'm here everyday."



Grace Soto has owned and operated the Anita Street Market for almost 13 years.



Frank Bothwell, a volunteer at the Urban League, brought a hat with a fitting message while working at an enrollment event in early March.

Photos by Kate Newton

Local Organizations Work to Secure Healthcare for South Tucsonans

By Kate Newton

In South Tucson, the road to affordable healthcare is paved with good intentions, but local organizations have often struggled to convert purpose into productivity when it comes to aiding the uninsured.

With a population that is more than 70 percent Hispanic, South Tucson has unique needs for health care coverage: about one in four uninsured American residents are Latino, and about 400,000 of those uninsured live in Arizona, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

As many as one-third of the nation's Hispanics are estimated to be uninsured, a statistic that exemplifies how ethnic and racial minorities demand additional attention when it

comes to targeting the approximate 50 million Americans without health coverage.

According to the U.S. Department of Health, however, about 10.2 million uninsured Latinos became eligible for coverage under the Affordable Care Act, either through the federal marketplace or health insurance programs on the state level, such as Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

Gov. Jan Brewer's decision to expand Arizona's Medicaid program, known as AHCCCS, was instrumental in addressing the pressing needs of the state's uninsured living at or below the poverty level, said Melissa Shafer, the community and government relations manager at Carondelet Health Network.

"Arizona has its challenges," Shafer said, citing diabetes and obesity as major problems the

state is facing as well as a high rate of uninsured residents. "So I think it was just so important that [Gov. Brewer] got behind that and she saw that we really do have a need. It was a tough battle for her... and now other states have come in behind or after her and are re-evaluating their decisions to not expand Medicaid."

Meeting the deadline

In an effort to enroll as many of the uninsured as possible before the marketplace's March 31 deadline, local health organization Carondelet, along with the Tucson Medical Center, University of Arizona Medical Center and other community partners, launched their "Healthcare I Can Afford?" campaign and accompanying website, SoAzCares.org, in January. The ads appeared on TV, radio and



Dennis Jordan, a lifelong resident of South Tucson, sought assistance at the Urban League after looking into various health insurance plans.

on billboards, and on Jan. 23, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius hosted a special webcast focused on the campaign.

Within two weeks of its launch, Shafer said the website had more than 1,200 hits and was “skewing high” among younger people. Meanwhile, views of the “Healthcare I Can Afford?” commercial, which hones in on the importance of preventative care, were “double the national average” for similar healthcare campaigns. Enrollment actions on the site were split almost evenly between the federal marketplace and AHCCCS.

A broader effort to reach the uninsured was led by Enroll America, a national non-profit that works to relay accurate and consistent information to Americans curious about their healthcare options, according to Pati Urias, the communications lead for Enroll America in Arizona.

One of their biggest challenges throughout months of community outreach involved misconceptions about the cost of health care. Of the approximately 30,000 people that the Arizona chapter had reached by January, “the majority” had not even considered accessing the marketplace because they either believed they were ineligible or that the plans would not be affordable, Urias said, even though Arizona’s prices are among the “lowest rates in the nation.”

“I think that’s probably the challenge that everybody has, reaching the populace of people who really need this information,” Urias said. “There are a lot of people out there who need it...so really getting out and about and reaching as many of the uninsured as possible is something that we really want to do.”

Targeting the uninsured

While Enroll America and similar organizations worked to move uninsured Arizonans on the path towards getting covered, the Pima County Health Department announced in February they would make a “massive statewide effort” to get individuals and families signed up as open enrollment entered its final month. One such effort, an event dubbed “Cover Pima County,” was met with heavy rain, which all but brought a city accustomed to 70-degree winter weather to a standstill.

“The world stops in Arizona when it rains,” said Debra Johnson as she stood at the entrance of the Tucson Urban League the morning of March 1, shaking her head in equal parts amusement and disbelief. Located near South Tucson, the organization was one of more than a dozen across the city to participate in the event, but by early afternoon only a handful of people had trickled in for enrollment assistance.

Johnson, the regional navigator program coordinator at the Urban League, said the timing was especially unfortunate because there had been a “lull in enrollment” not only in the state, but across the nation in the early months of 2014.

While a recent Gallup poll found that the the rate of uninsured in America is at its lowest since Obama took office, Hispanics remained more likely than any other racial group to be uninsured, with the national proportion of Hispanics without health coverage dropping by a mere 1.7 percentage points in the final months of federal health care enrollment.

Johnson said South Tucson is at “the epicenter of one of the highest zip codes of uninsured,” especially vulnerable because of its poverty rate and pressing health issues, which include high rates of diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Certified navigators, volunteers and an insurance broker were all present at the Urban League, and were working to combat two pieces of misinformation Johnson said had plagued the process from the get-go: that the open enrollment deadline indeed closes on March 31, and that the penalty for not enrolling is not simply a one-time, flat fee of \$95.

The penalty, in fact, is \$95 per adult and \$47.50 per child, or 1 percent of the household’s gross income - whichever is greater - and is likely to increase next year, according to Alex Cooper, the business development manager of the Tucson Hispanic Chamber of Commerce who also serves as a navigator.

Johnson and Cooper have made presentations across the community in locations such as San Miguel High School and the Quincie Douglas Public Library, but Johnson acknowledged that more presentations should have been made to help alert South Tucsonans to their options. She said consistent community outreach seemed to be the most successful way to turn around a slow start caused by now-infamous technical problems, a lack of knowledge on how to discuss health insurance and a general reticence to ask for help.

Limited outreach to Hispanics plagued the Obama administration from the onset in the federal marketplace rollout, and it took its toll on public opinion: support for the law dropped among Latinos from 61 percent to 47 percent in just six months, according to a March study from the Pew Research Center.

“It’s unfortunate that the deadline is now because of all of the problems early on,” Johnson said. “We were in that learning curve and the marketplace was not very user-friendly. We really lost a lot of time in enrolling people.”

The turnaround in a matter of months, however, was reassuring for Johnson and her volunteers, she added, and served to reiterate the importance of getting people covered through a movement that “is not only a healthcare initiative, but a poverty initiative” as well.

“I think that from October to today, improvements to the marketplace have been tremendous,” Johnson said. “I’m just excited because I think



The Tucson Urban League was one of more than a dozen locations in the greater Tucson area to offer healthcare enrollment assistance on March 1 as part of the “Cover Pima County” event.

this is something that so many families really and truly can benefit from. It’s history in the making so it’s exciting to be a part of that.”

Looking forward

Cooper said he believes Hispanics are among the groups most likely to benefit from the ACA because it “addresses the inequalities previously among minorities in America.” Many Latinos had pre-existing conditions that prevented them from securing coverage in the past, but people with pre-existing conditions are not excluded under the new system.

As new obstacles have fallen away, however, new ones have risen to take their place.

The centralized, technology-driven marketplace caused woes for many who are unfamiliar with how to navigate the plan options online. This was especially true in South Tucson, where computer access in the home is fairly uncommon. The sign-up process required an email address — which many people do not have — and if the password or answers to the rather complex identification questions can’t be entered correctly, enrollees were often left back at square one.

Christina Burns, an insurance broker, could not access the marketplace herself after losing her password, despite the fact that assisting people throughout the enrollment process became a major part of her job. The irony was not lost on her, but regardless of these setbacks Burns agreed the marketplace had become more user-friendly, especially in terms of becoming a one-stop shop for every step of the process. She said one of the major improvements was the feature that allowed users to pay directly on the site as they viewed the plans rather than waiting for the marketplace to communicate with the insurance companies.

Confusion remained, however, regarding the plans offered. During the enrollment period, there were often dozens of plans available from private companies under

each level of coverage — bronze, silver, gold and platinum — and sometimes up to “three or four plans per company.” Consolidating these options into “one plan per company, per level” could help ease the likelihood of being overwhelmed in the future, Burns said.

While visitors to the Urban League on March 1 set about picking their plans with the help of Burns, Cooper and other volunteers, two of them seemed to slip through the cracks. Rafael Righinis took home a paper application after attempts to create an email account and link it to the marketplace were unsuccessful. Plus, cost estimates under the website’s calculator were out of his price range.

In short, he said, it was a “fiasco.”

“A lot of people think that, OK, you’re going to pay this amount of money, but the government can help you, so you don’t have to dish out



Alex Cooper assists Susana Guerrero through the healthcare enrollment process at the Tucson Urban League.

that amount,” Righinis said regarding information perpetuated by some navigators and other professionals that tax credits can greatly lessen the total cost of coverage. “It’s not really affordable in my opinion.”

He said he planned to proceed with the paper application, but would pay the penalty if the cost was not realistic for him and his wife.

Dennis Jordan, a lifelong resident of South Tucson, had a similar experience: faced with paying about \$200 a month for coverage, he opted out despite prolonged efforts to get coverage for the last year-and-a-half. However, he said his visit to the Urban League was helpful in that it cleared up conflicting information he was faced with while searching for plans online outside of the marketplace.

Jordan and Righinis’ qualms seemed to be over one word — “affordable”— and their experience left them both asking, “Affordable for whom?” Jordan said healthcare reform seemed to leave hard-

working people out of luck if their income left them in limbo between the marketplace and AHCCCS.

“If you’re wealthy, you’re going to have no problem, or if you’re under the poverty line, then you’re going to get AHCCCS, you’re going to get assistance or some-

thing else,” Jordan said. “But if you’re that middle of the line, middle class, you get penalized. You’re paying for everybody, and nobody’s helping you.”

While even those most informed about the ACA are far from certain about how the law will continue to unfold in the future, they seem assured of one thing: there’s much to be done, and many obstacles to overcome, but staying stagnant is not an option.

“When you are inspired, and you set your mind to it, nothing can stop you,” said Frank Bothwell, a volunteer at the Urban League. “Change is good, if you think about it.”

“When you are inspired, and you set your mind to it, nothing can stop you. Change is good, if you think about it.”

-Frank Bothwell, Urban League volunteer

