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SPRING 2013

Independiente

A publication of the University of Arizona School of Journalism

A STRUGGLE FOR SCHOOLS

One school is shuttered, others remake themselves, and South Tucson rallies in support

Journeys in a food desert
The harsh realities for those with limited access to fresh food

Mural program helps at-risk students
Without art, "a lot of kids would lose the will to go to school."

South Tucson's restaurant scene

EL INDEPENDIENTE

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

El Independiente has long held the responsibility of trying to find interesting ways to tell the stories of the people and places in the unique city of South Tucson. For this spring's edition, we focused on themes that do not always come to mind when thinking about this small, multicultural community.

We found a distinctive style of life, and we admired the way South Tucson is developing a name for itself among other cities in Arizona. With its quirks and eccentricities, "SoTu" – as we dubbed it here at El Independiente – has become a place of connections, networks and enrichment. With their programs, businesses and events, these Arizonans are working to overcome issues like extreme poverty, obesity, behavioral health problems and youth violence. Those who call South Tucson home are a representation of so many Americans who are struggling to find a sense of hope despite hardship.

We found a prevailing contribution within South Tucson's community organizations, which we hoped to share through our storytelling in both our magazine and website, elindenews.com.

In our continued effort to give voice to the city's residents, we include Spanish translations for some of our stories here, with even more bilingual pieces featured online.

Our online version also provides readers with a second platform to explore our articles more deeply with multimedia and graphics.

We are inspired and humbled by those we met on our journey to convey these stories of South Tucson, and we hope our magazine reveals the sense of togetherness and community that resonates within this city.

Enjoy reading!

En Español

Desde hace mucho tiempo, ***El Independiente*** mantiene la responsabilidad de encontrar maneras interesantes para contar las historias de las personas y de los lugares en la ciudad tan única del Sur de Tucson. Para la edición de esta primavera, nos centramos en temas que no siempre se vienen a la mente cuando se piensa en esta pequeña comunidad multicultural.

A través de nuestros reportajes, hemos sido capaces de encontrar un patrón distintivo en la manera de cómo los residentes viven y la manera en la cual el Sur de Tucson está desarrollando un nombre para sí mismo entre otras ciudades de Arizona.

Con todas sus peculiaridades y excentricidades, el Sur de Tucson – "SoTu", como le pusimos – se ha convertido en un lugar de conexiones, redes y enriquecimiento.

Por medio de sus programas, negocios y eventos, estos ciudadanos de Arizona están trabajando para superar problemas como la pobreza extrema, la obesidad, la salud mental y la violencia juvenil.

Aquellos que llaman hogar a la ciudad del Sur de Tucson son una representación de muchos estadounidenses que luchan por encontrar un sentido de esperanza a pesar de las dificultades.

Encontramos una contribución predominante dentro de las organizaciones de la comunidad del Sur de Tucson, la cual esperamos compartir a través de nuestra narración, tanto en nuestra revista como en nuestro sitio web, elindenews.com.

En nuestro continuo esfuerzo para dar voz a los residentes de la ciudad, incluimos traducciones al español de muchas de nuestras historias, incluso con más piezas bilingües publicadas en línea.

Nuestra versión en línea también ofrece a los lectores una segunda plataforma para explorar nuestros artículos más profundamente con multimedia y gráficas.

Nos sentimos inspirados y honrados por la gente que conocimos en nuestro camino al transmitir estas historias del Sur de Tucson, y esperamos que nuestra revista revele el sentido y la sensación de unión y comunidad que resuena dentro de esta ciudad.

¡Disfrútelo!

Meaghan Fee

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Spring 2013

Lincoln Jr. Miranda playing with a chick he caught at Arizona Country Feeds Store in South Tucson.

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Back: At the Garden Kitchen, Gabriel Hernandez, 3, assembles a plant from felt pieces. *Photography cover, back and above by Mariana Dale*

Top of the News

City manager, mayor both resign as a new majority takes council

South Tucson voters elected a new majority coalition to the City Council in the March primary, and Mayor Jennifer Eckstrom and City Manager Enrique Serna both have resigned.

Eckstrom, who works as chief of staff to Pima County Supervisor Ramón Valadez, said she was resigning from the mayor's job to focus on her wedding plans. Serna, who served South Tucson fulltime, said he would retire at the end of May.

Three new council members were chosen in the March primary, and the new majority promises reform and governmental "transparency," according to new member Ildefonso Green.

The three new members are Vanessa Mendoza, who describes herself as a full-time student; Oscar Patino, who Green said has worked with the Santa Cruz Church, and Green, who said he is a senior housing technician for the city of Tucson. To fill the Eckstrom seat, the South Tucson City Council appointed Miguel Rojas, who is retired, according to Veronica Moreno, the city clerk for South Tucson.

Mary Soltero is the only member from the former majority remaining in office; her current term ends in 2015.

Ousted were Acting Mayor John Felix, Carlos Salaz and Pete Tadeo.

Green and current council members Paul Díaz and Anita Romero said that Mendoza and Patino will join them to form a voting bloc. They said the next mayor is likely to be either Díaz or Romero. "Our policies are going to be transparency. Period," Diaz said.

Public safety is a priority, Romero said. "We want to know that somebody is going to be here in a reasonable amount of time," she said.

The electorate voted to emphasize their opposition, Green said. "They showed how upset they are by basically voting everybody out," he said.

Diaz said that the mayoral election and swearing in the new council members is scheduled for June 10.

– Megan Hurley

To save money on jails, city council approves home detention program

The South Tucson City Council approved home detention for some offenders last month, part of the city's effort to cut the number of people it sends to Pima County Jail.

The program, which started March 1, allows City Magistrate Ronald A. Wilson some latitude in deciding whether an offender needs to be jailed.

"There are times where certain types of defendants are not an immediate threat or danger to society, or themselves," he said in an interview. "When that's the case, it's in the best interest of the city, victim and state to allow the offender to participate in home detention instead of going to jail."

The city owes Pima County some $1.7 million in back payments for jailing people arrested in South Tucson. City Manager Enrique Serna told council members in February that the city is paying a steep price for non-residents.

"South Tucson disproportionately pays for the cost of incarcerating individuals," he said. "Nearly 85 percent of those arrested don't have a South Tucson mailing address."

City Attorney Patrick Moran, who presented the home-detention proposal, said the savings are compelling. "Essentially, the biggest benefit of the program will be the reduction in jail costs. We have a rather large, astounding bill," Moran said.

Pima County charges South Tucson about $150 a day for jailing an offender. Home detention costs nothing, Moran said, because the offender pays for monitoring.

In this case Southwest Intervention Services would monitor offenders and report to the court on diversion and probation compliance and completion. Offenders would pay Southwest $15 a day and a monthly probation fee of $30.

Serna believes that the home detention and other alternative-sentencing measures will help cut the city's jail bill.

In 2012, 1,306 people were arrested in South Tucson, according to South Tucson City Planner Mick Jensen.

"An awful lot of people who go to jail on a South Tucson charge are picked up on a warrant violation, mostly by the Tucson police. We have the highest arrest rate in the surrounding area, possibly even in the county and state," Jensen said.

The city has been working on cutting the jail bill, but, he said, "even with what we've done so far, the jail bill can vary from $12,000 to $15,000 per month."

Offenders in the program will be required to stay home for a certain period of time every day, and will not be able to leave, except for work, school or a medical emergency. The offender will be required to wear a GPS-enabled ankle bracelet, which is provided and monitored by SIS.

"There are a lot of options that are often more appropriate than incarceration," Wilson said. "But where incarceration is mandatory or appropriate, it's good to have two forms available, jail or home detention."

– Simran Chhatwal

Greyhound Park cuts number of race days after city bars steroids

Greyhound Park in South Tucson is moving away from live betting and into simulcasting in order to stay afloat and comply with new laws protecting racing dogs.

Recently, Tucson City Council banned the use of steroids on female greyhounds, which the park had used to prevent the dogs from going into heat. In addition, the state legislature has eased restrictions on simulcast betting, which allowed Greyhound Park to handle horse and dog wagering with fewer than 200 racing days a year.

Tom Taylor, the park's general manager, said the park, which opened 69 years ago, has cut racing days from six to four a week as a direct result of new restrictions.

Because of the changes he is no longer running female dogs. "We now have less dogs and less races," he said. "Half of our business is out of our control, part of our business (simulcast betting) is still on."

The steroid measure was introduced by Steve Kozachik, the Democrat representing Ward Six. The ban prohibits performance-enhancing steroids in racing greyhounds. "If a vet sees legitimate medical use then that's another thing," Kozachik added.

Voters in the city of South Tucson banned steroids five years ago. Taylor began transporting the dogs to Tucson for the injections. "When I found out that Tom was obscuring the law, I took action," Kozachik said.

Taylor said the dogs were not being hurt. "Show dogs and police dogs use these anabolic steroids, and we used it because it was the safest," Taylor said.

Greyhound Park is one of the only live dog racing parks left in Arizona.

At issue is a proposal to allow racetracks in counties with populations of 1.5 million or less to have simulcast betting without requiring the track to hold live races. Currently, this is the case in counties with 500,000 people or less.

– Lindsay Silverman

An "ugly ending" for once-popular motel that drew movie stars

Some 140,000 cars and trucks pass by South Tucson on I-10 every day, and city officials worry that passers-by are getting a bad first impression.

Their concern: the abandoned Spanish Trail Motel, once a popular destination and now a burned-out shell with a broken, rusted sign.

South Tucson City Manager Enrique Serna said that new arrivals at the Tucson International Airport can't miss the blighted scene en route downtown.

"The big corporations come to talk to the city officials, county officials about bringing enterprise here," he said. "They see that and it obviously gives a negative impression."

He added that police departments have safety concerns, since abandoned buildings because are potential places for crimes or fires. Marc Brown, a police officer in South Tucson, said: "It is something we have to watch and keep an eye on and hope that the owner will help us watch over it."

Serna recalled the glory days of decades ago. "It was still a nice hotel, lots of rooms, nice restaurants, a large lobbying bar where people gathered, important people, famous people. It did have a lot of history."

It had a golf course, lagoon, running track and a cactus garden. Movie stars, as well as the rich and famous, stayed there while visiting or working at the Old Tucson Studios. The motel burned in a 1999 fire, causing $400,000 in damage, according to the Tucson Citizen's account at the time.

The Spanish Trail, built in 1939, is owned by Dennis Luttrell, according to public records at the Pima County Assessor's office. The motel is at South 4th Avenue and I-10 and covers 85,542 square feet with a value of $1,031,227, according to the records. Luttrell did not respond to emails and three telephone calls to his home of record and his Spanish Trail Apartment office.

Today, as South Tucson tries to attract business development, the city has been in talks with developers about proposals for the large parcels along I-10, including the Spanish Trail site. "It is going to have some value for some business," Serna said. "The Spanish Trail story is over. It is kind of an ugly ending to a very wonderful story."

– Zhangli Bu

Teams of Eller students helping to advise small-business owners

The Eller College of Management is sending some of its top students into South Tucson's small businesses as economic development coaches.

The Eller Economic Development Program, funded by a $100,000 grant from JPMorgan Chase, is matching Eller students with South Tucson businesses for the first time, according to Leslie Eldenburg, McClelland Professor of Accounting, who initiated the project. The program supports minority-owned, female-owned and other small businesses in South Tucson. This year, she said, six small businesses will participate: Beef Master Meat Market LLC, La Tauna Tortillas, McElroy's Automotive, The Handyman, Margarita's Construction

and Arizona Radiators & Muffler.

Eldenburg said, "Next year we hope to grow that to 10 and we hope to eventually grow that number to 15. So the plan is eventually to be working with 15 businesses a year."

Ildefonso "Poncho" Chavez, the Eller program manager, said students will work in teams, just as real business coaches work. "We tried to find businesses where students could really make a difference," he said.

Sam Williams, the board advisor of the Eller Economic Development Program, said South Tucson meets the criteria set by the J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation for assistance in low-income areas. "The per capital income down there in South Tucson is like $17,000," Eldenburg said. "In Tucson it's $35,000, twice as much."

Williams said that businesses with 5 years of experience are primed for the program. "You can help the managers with whatever is required," Williams said. "This is what the program's about."

With his own experience running a sales force development firm called New View Group, Williams said business would encounter a ceiling as it grew. "Many just don't know what's holding their business. It is invisible," he said. "But this program has a component, which did analyze and design the nature of ceiling, which is preventing the business from growing."

Chavez said the ways to measure success are numbers of employees and increases in the revenues these small businesses bring in.

Willams said the Eller program could create 30 more jobs for a business with 20 employees. "If you can do that with hundreds of businesses, that's really good," he said. One challenge is that students have no experience advising business owners. "This is the first time anybody has done this," Williams said.

New business workshops in Spanish began in March, and new business certificate courses in Spanish began in April.

– Zhangli Bu

Plans for solar power in city are derailed by cuts in energy incentive

South Tucson wanted to cut its electric bills by harnessing solar energy, but plans were put on hold because the state suddenly eliminated a significant incentive.

In January, the Arizona Corporation Commission voted unexpectedly to cut commercial support. Commissioners argued that consumers were complaining that the incentive added to their utility bills. South Tucson had received bids by December from two firms who proposed installing panels on city property to try and save money, according to city planner Mick Jensen.

South Tucson, like other solar advocates around the state, was caught by surprise. City Manager Enrique Serna has told the county that the city would like to acquire some 40 acres for panels and generate as much as $1 million in energy a year.

Jensen said one bid would have saved South Tucson about $200,000 over 20 years, he said. But when the Arizona Corporation Commission eliminated the incentive, the proposal lost viability.

The commission had planned to send $10.5 million to Tucson Electric Power this year in performance-based incentive money for solar installation. Some $20.8 million was to go to Arizona Public Service. Neither utility will get the incentive money, according to Greentech Media. The publication quoted Ben Higgins, legislative director for Mainstream Energy/REC Solar, as saying: "This effectively kills the commercial solar market in Arizona."

Bringing solar energy to South Tucson makes sense. "We also know it is a cost-saving measure for us," Serna said in a press conference.

The communications director for the Arizona Corporation Commission, Rebecca Wilder, said Tucson Electric Power customers pay a surcharge for an incentive that goes to companies that a city like South Tucson would contract with. "It's expensive," Wilder said by phone. "You try to find that balance."

Thomas Galvin, the policy advisor to Commissioner Brenda Burns, said the surcharge was proposed at $4.75 a month, but with the elimination of the incentive and other factors, it is now $3.80 a month.

For now, South Tucson is trying to figure out whether even to continue to pursue solar power, and if so, how. Jensen said there are still some technical issues to consider, like what type of solar paneling to use, and where.

Panels could be installed on city buildings with newer roofs like the John Valenzuela Youth Center, but not ones like City Hall, which has an older roof. Jensen also said that parking structures could support the panels, though they would need more expensive steel supports. A third and cheaper alternative is ground mounting, but security would be a concern.

Betty Stamper, the Pima County Regional Solar Coordinator, said solar energy is so important, no matter the jurisdiction. "We have an abundance of sunshine," Stamper said by phone. "The cost of utilities are going to be going up."

Bruce Plenk, the solar energy coordinator for the city of Tucson, said by phone that southern Arizona has opportunities. "Fundamentally we have an amazing resource in southern Arizona -- namely energy."

– Megan Hurley

A mural on 29th Street near Fourth Avenue shows once-popular tattoos from the 30s and 40s. The work was designed by Saul Ortega and a few other artists from Las Artes, a youth program that uses art as a way to keep teenagers in the classroom. (Story, page 13.)

Beautiful, handcrafted murals decorate the streets of South Tucson. If you're driving you just might miss some, so stop and take a walk so you can stop to marvel at each detail. The mural above shows a man and woman decorated with popular Mexican-American tattoos and symbols of Chicano culture. When you get close, you see the tattoos help tell part of the story of South Tucson.

Saul Ortega is a teacher at Las Artes, a youth program that helps young adults who have been out of school to get back on track and graduate with a GED. "We're introducing public artwork to the community so it kind of beautifies the area," Ortega said.

This particular mural shows tattoos from the 1930s and 40s. You can see the "Virgen de Guadalupe," a sacred symbol of faith. There is a calabera, the skull that represents Day of the Dead celebrations. And there are military insignias. Not only does the art help illustrate the history of South Tucson it also connects the community, young adults and the artists.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER

See more of Jennifer Cordova's work at elindenews.com.

By Morgan Toone
Photographs by Zhangli Bu

TRANSFORMED SONORAN STYLE By adding Victorian embellishments, gabled metal roofing and brick roof caping, Tucson's unique Sonoran style was transformed.

El Barrio Santa Rosa

En aquel entonces y ahora

SONORAN ROW STYLE Typically one story, the home opens with a narrow entrance. Recent urban renewal efforts have made a two-story Sonoran Row home more common.

Barrio Santa Rosa, nestled between Armory Park and Barrio Libre, is one of Tucson's most notable historic neighborhoods. Estela Garcia, who was born into the neighborhood, saw the transformation from south side "slum" to the vivid community that it is today.

"When I was a kid growing up this area in particular right here, where Santa Rosa is, was considered for lack of a better word, the projects or slums of Tucson," Garcia said.

Because of extensive urban renewal efforts and colorful history, the Barrio Santa Rosa is now home to Tucsonans of all walks of life. Garcia spent a great deal of time in the neighborhood at her godmother's Sonoran Row style home. The layout of the home, typical of Sonoran Row houses, opened with a long, narrow entryway that led to a kitchen, with rooms to the rear and a tiny garden out back.

"It was just such a neat place," Garcia said. "I think the people that still live here that have lived here a long time try and maintain that integrity."

The rich history of Barrio Santa Rosa began in the 1890s with an explosion of the Sonoran architecture. Sonoran, a style that has become synonymous with bacon-wrapped hotdogs, is often thought of as a recent fusion of Mexican and American

(continue on page 12)

SONORAN STYLE Dating back to Mexican occupation of Southern Arizona in 1840, this style is characterized by high ceilings, adobe block construction, long central hallways and roof drainage pipes referred to as "canales."

SPANISH COLONIAL REVIVAL This style, which arose in the 20th century, featured additions of smooth stucco walls, low-pitched clay tile, flat roofs, decorative wrought iron trim and small porches or balconies.

(from page 9)

culture but actually dates back to the Mexican-American War and even settlement of New Spain in what is now the United States of America.

The district contains 124 buildings, 98 of which date back to the neighborhood's most significant period, 1895-1955, when the first dwellings were built. Of these 98, more than half are considered Sonoran Tradition architecture.

Homes in the Santa Rosa neighborhood are on the market for anywhere between $300,000 and $550,000. The Barrio Santa Rosa appeared on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places in 2011, for its unique blend of traditional, revival, and post-war styles of architecture. It has been a long evolution.

In the 1940s, an evaluation of Tucson's housing standards was conducted. Extensive renovation of the Barrio Santa Rosa was recommended. With a federal loan of $750,000, the Tucson Housing Authority built a 162-unit housing development, called La Reforma, for low-income families.

Over the next 20 years, the housing authority tried to expand La Reforma by nearly 200 homes. Tucson businessman Roy Drachman argued that the advocacy for public housing was an attempt at socialism, a serious accusation following World War II. But in 1965, the expansion was approved just west of the original project. Featuring a neighborhood recreation center, the new project was named Connie W. Chambers Homes after Housing Authority Director Cornelius "Connie" Chambers.

Intended as an affordable solution to historic preservation, the project hurt the quality and aesthetic appeal of the neighborhood, Garcia said. She recalls the Connie Chambers buildings being of much lower quality than that of La Reforma.

"I had a good friend in high school that lived in Connie Chambers, and he said that they were really drafty and were not made very well so they didn't last very long," Garcia said.

Over the next 10 years, the City of Tucson and the "La Reforma Angry Tenants Committee" fought for the demolition of La Reforma and Connie Chambers. In 1979, the Old Pueblo South Community plan was designed to revitalize the deteriorating neighborhoods of Tucson's historic districts. In 1983 demolition began on La Reforma. Tucson was allotted $14.6 million by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to reconstruct Connie Chambers and the Santa Rosa neighborhood, which was named after the Santa Rosa Park that opened in 1937.

Demolition began on Connie Chambers in 1999. When the present-day Santa Rosa Neighborhood Center was built in its place, many Connie Chambers residents were forced out of the area. Garcia's grandmother-in-law was one such resident who was warned alongside other residents to accept any financial offer made on the house or risk receiving less than what the property is really worth.

"Well they didn't get what their property was worth anyway and a lot of those people had to relocate," Garcia said.

The demolished development was replaced by Posadas Sentinel. The 120-unit housing project introduced 60 market rent units, while the rest remains public housing, according to Posadas Sentinel Leasing Office Manager Edna Duran.

"We do have income qualifications for both programs; you can't be over income," Duran said.

It also included the construction of Drachman-Montessori K-6 Magnet School at the location of the original Santa Rosa Park. A day-care complex, a neighborhood center, the Santa Rosa Branch Library, and a new Santa Rosa Park were also built as part of the Barrio Santa Rosa Historic District.

"They wanted to make it a whole family-oriented place to live," Duran said.

However, a project that was intended to be beneficial for revitalization of a low-income neighborhood actually resulted in an increase in property taxes that displaced many of the low-income families. The urban renewal has attracted a more affluent Anglo-American crowd and has spurred construction of a more Neo-Traditional style of architecture that detracts from the history of the Traditional Sonoran Row.

"On one hand you are moving in because of all the rich history of the neighborhood but at the same time by moving in, you are helping to ruin its preservation," said Santa Rosa resident and librarian Becky Mokler.

Garcia, a Pima County Public Health nurse stationed at the Santa Rosa library, works closely with neighborhood children, often giving tours around the neighborhood. When out on tour, Garcia points out the abundance of old, rundown adobe-style homes in contrast to the newly renovated adobe office buildings.

"Part of me says, well, that's really great that they are renovating those buildings but then part of me says, yeah but those are businesses, they're not homes where people live," Garcia said. "It's kind of a clash between two different cultures; two different people."

"It would be really cool," she added, "if the city made a commitment to help people that live there renovate their homes and help them in that way if they really wanted to revitalize the neighborhood."

Denice Osbourne, a real-estate agent with Long Realty, has been working with the historic districts of downtown Tucson for 16 years. According to Osbourne, the Spanish and Moorish bungalow houses attract the most buyers and sell much faster than the contemporary '50s structures.

"Most people who renovate try to restore the house to its original character," Osbourne said. "They have to make it look authentic to try and bring it back to that era. If they don't, it won't sell."

BY ANNIE DEMUTH
STORY & PHOTOGRAPHY

LAS ARTES: MURAL PROJECT ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO FINISH HIGH SCHOOL

Seven students spread out at tables in the brightly lighted art studio, a vibrant room of color and creativity. Some paint a tile mosaic; others trace a silhouette of Marlon Brando in "The Godfather." On the walls hang colorful pop art of Marilyn Monroe, Bob Marley, Muhammad Ali and President Obama.

This is Las Artes, a county-administered program for high school dropouts, which helps students earn their GED and seek training and jobs. Las Artes highlights the importance of art education at a time when dozens of public schools have had to eliminate programs because of budget cuts.

"Many times those alternatives are part of the drive that keeps that student in school," said Elena West, director and principal of Las Artes Arts & Education Center. "If they see those things being taken away, it just shuts down their ability to be individual and to grow."

Students enrolled in fine-arts courses score higher on the SAT than those without, according to a report called "Voices in the Arts: Perspectives on the Importance of the Arts in Education" by members of the College Board, an organization that prepares standardized tests for college placement.

"It's unfortunate that in today's day and age, education is so poorly funded that those alternatives are being cut," West said. "I think it's very sad." Las Artes receives federal and general

PHOTO: *Making a mural of Marlon Brando, students trace a projected image before transferring the design to tile.*

A tile mural of Lotería cards, the popular Latin American game, decorates the Las Artes center.

funding as well as Workforce Investment Act money, West said. Most of her students believe they have "no artistic talent," she said, but drawing, painting mosaic tiles and other work helps them express their feelings and to mature. Art also helps reach students who might appear to have given up.

"We battle, as educators, the anti-education attitude in students," said Patrick Connell, an art teacher at Rincon High School. "We have to have other ways, like art, to attract them in schools."

Advocates claim that employment in arts-related jobs are set to rise 16 percent through 2016, which is faster than the national average in most fields, according to an article about art education on DoSomething.org, an advocacy group for art education.

Manisha Sharma, a professor of art and visual culture education at the University of Arizona, teaches the cognitive and emotional force of art education.

"The less value art is given in schools, the less understanding there is about why it is vital," Sharma said. "Most art programs today are arts and visual culture. So in that sense, if we don't have that – how we think and act – that's a component that becomes weakened."

If children aren't exposed to art at an early age, she added, it affects a student's learning at the college level. "There's a gap of skill," she said.

Despite the rise of interest in art, schools have been forced to eliminate it because of budget cuts. The Tucson schools face a shortfall of $17 million, officials said.

"The difficulty in an academic situation is where the other courses become more of a priority," said Suellen Roediger, an art teacher at University High School who has taught advanced-placement art history, advanced-placement studio art and beginning art for more than 10 years.

Sharma believes that the more informed society becomes about art education and literature, the more likely policy changes will be made at a higher level for the benefit of arts programs in schools.

"Seeing things not just in one way, but in multiple ways… that's the kind of affect that the arts have," Sharma said. "If policymakers and legislators could see that, then I think the arts wouldn't be cut out."

Connell concedes that Rincon and other Tucson high schools are less at risk of losing their arts programs, but worries about the middle schools.

Plans for transforming middle schools have been a topic of discussion among Sunnyside governing board members for

Mosaics showing traditional dress hang in the studio where the students create their own art pieces.

years because sixth, seventh and eighth grades are the years when students are most likely to become disengaged and at risk of dropping out.

If arts programs were cut, Connell said, "a lot of kids would lose the will to go to school."

The level of determination changes from school to school, and often, is not something even a passionate teacher can control. Entering his second year at Rincon, Connell has noticed differences with the students' behavior there as opposed to his previous teaching job at Sabino High School in Tucson.

"Kids at Rincon don't see [art] as an integral part of their lives," Connell said.

At Las Artes, many students re-engage. Students who came from a traditional school and didn't fit in often say "I finally came to a place that I felt that the instructors and the staff cared," West said. This revelation often takes place during the speech students are required to make to their invited guest at graduation. By then, they have "learned the Las Artes way," she said.

In October 2012, Las Artes students created three walls of artwork, called "Bio Wall" at the University of Arizona Bio Park. UA President Anne Weaver Hart, as well as the mayor and other officials, attended the dedication of the work. "For a lot of our students, they are not always used to being successful," West said. "Seeing [their work] placed in the community elevates self-esteem and self-confidence."

According to recent data, art influences students' success in math, problem solving and critical thinking, Connell said. It improves overall academic achievement and school success, according to Americans for the Arts, an organization that supports and promotes the vision for arts in education across the country. Young people who participate in the arts for at least three hours, for three days each week, for one year are four times more likely to be recognized for academic achievement.

Roediger said that art has even helped her students to write better. "Their ability to compose an essay is like composing the organizing elements of art in a two-dimensional or three-dimensional way," she said. The first nine years Roediger taught at University High School, she didn't teach strictly art. Instead, she incorporated art into history classes as a way for her students to see art in all ways of life.

Adds Sharma: "The less art there is in schools, the less knowledge there is. If you don't have that skill, how productive you are able to be in today's world is limited."

By Annie DeMuth

Lessons in dance, lessons in life

The quiet shuffle of ballet shoes and occasional chatter of little girls in pink tutus drifts through a pre-ballet dance session Saturday mornings. These girls, now 3 to 5, may someday appear in the South Tucson company's best-known production, its annual "Nutcracker" performance, which sells out at the Historic Fox Tucson Theatre every Christmas.

On this spring day, the animated instructor, Joseph Rodgers, shows the girls how to have fun and in the process, he hopes ,also to build character. "Someone once told me you only have 30 seconds to change a kid's mind. If I can get them interested in that 30 seconds, then I'm cool," said Rodgers, the founding director of the non-profit dance studio, Dancing in the Streets Arizona.

The studio, at 88 W. 38th Street, Suite 200, caters to at-risk youth and underserved families. Its motto is "changing minds and changing lives – one jeté at a time." Some 150 children participate.

Rodgers's wife, Soleste Lupu, is the program's co-founder and artistic director. She has known him since he was 13, when they attended the same ballet school. "Joey's just had this gift since he was young," she said. "There's a lot of play, but we still get the work done."

Rodgers got the idea for the studio while attending his friend's Memorial Day barbecue several years ago. Children there were inside and bored. He made a challenge. He offered a $5 reward to each child who could do a particularly complicated dance move. No one could master it, but the kids stayed in the street practicing. From this, the name for the studio was born.

Since opening, the studio has staged five full-length Nutcracker productions in the winters and one summer production in 2009. The Civic Orchestra of Tucson performs, and parents and volunteers help backstage. Dancing in the Street's 2013 Nutcracker performance will take place at the Fox Theatre on Dec. 14 and 15.

"The production is a lot of work, and we start working in August for the December performance," said Marian Lupu, chairman of the studio's board and Soleste's mother. The performance changes lives, she said. "The earlier you can put a youngster on stage, the sooner they get that self-confidence," she said. "You need that self-confidence all your life."

For the first Nutcracker in 2008, the studio needed adults to fill the stage for an 1870s party scene. They recruited parents. "For many of the students and some of those parents, they had never seen a live orchestra before," Lupu said.

A few months later, Marian Lupu received an e-mail from one of the fathers who said: "When I walked onstage, the most fantastic thing happened to me. I lost my inhibitions. Everybody since then has been saying to me, 'You're so much easier to get

Joseph Rodgers, co-founder and artistic director, corrects one student hanging on the bar, as others raise their arms into fifth position. The company is known for its "Nutcracker" performance.

along with and you're so much more outgoing.' I really want to thank you. Is there any way I can continue to be involved?"

The man went on to perform the next year in the studio's production of Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream." He was also promoted at his company and told Lupu it was a direct result of that night on stage.

"Very often this is the first time that families work together," Marian Lupu said. "We try to use both the student who's performing and everybody else backstage in some way or another. It teaches teamwork."

Some "Dancing in the Streets" alumni are now in dance programs at the University of Arizona and Pima Community College. Arianna Ruiz, 20, a sophomore at the University of Arizona majoring in public health, performed four Nutcracker productions with the studio. She continues to dance with Dancing in the Streets while going to classes and working. A first-generation college student, she never thought she could afford college. "[Dancing in the Streets] really pushed me," Ruiz said. "It's very different compared to other dance studios."

Ruiz's mother persuaded her to join Dancing in the Streets when she was 17, her only dance experience an elective high school class.

"Soleste tells me from time to time how I'm one of her most improved students," Ruiz said. "When I started at Dancing in the Streets I couldn't even point my toes."

Like Ruiz, who is unsure if she will continue to dance after

PHOTO: **ANNIE DEMUTH**

college, not everyone from the program makes dancing a life career. But the artistic directors concede that that's not the point.

"We want them to have those skills whether they will become professional dancers or not," Soleste Lupu said.

Since the studio is non-profit, the artistic directors say it is often difficult to provide all the necessary arrangements for these productions, even with a considerable number of sponsors.

"We don't get a lot of revenue from tuition," Marian Lupu said. "About 75 percent of our students are at least on partial scholarship."

The studio receives contributions from Danswest Dance Productions Inc., another ballet school in the Tucson area, which donates supplies for students to use. It is also working with the Shelter Alliance on a program to raise funds through the recycling of old cell phones.

Amy Salgado, who brings her three daughters to Dancing in the Streets every week, is one of the head volunteers who commits her time to the studio for free. Two of her girls, Emily, 8, and Mia, 5, have been a part of every performance for the last six years except one. "The performances really give them a sense of worth," she said. Salgado pointed to her youngest daughter, Bella, 2, who was dressed in a pink tutu. "She begs for her ballet."

As much as students grow in skill and character, the instructors, at the same time, say they also become inspired every day.

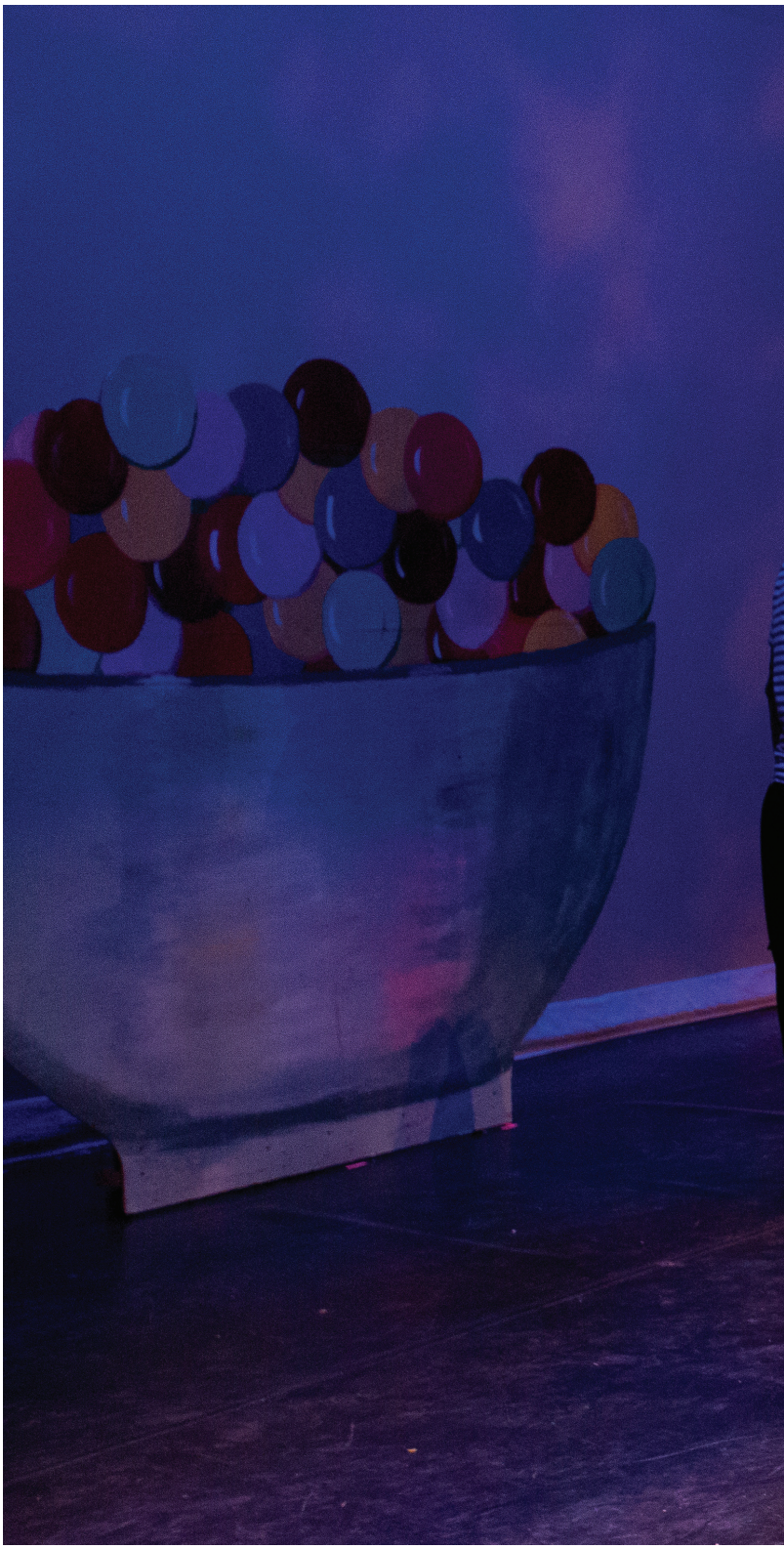
"I just love that they're at the age that they soak up everything. They yearn to be that ultimate dancer," said Julia Cannaday, 26, a volunteer instructor for jazz musical theater at Dancing in the Streets.

"We're trying to change people's minds, especially the kids," Rodgers said. "My teacher reached out to me, so I'm just taking the skills of what my teacher did and applying them a little bit broader."

Rodgers and Soleste Lupu were high school sweethearts but both married other people. After they both divorced, they were finally reunited and married. As their wedding gift, they asked people to make a contribution to a charity of their choice, or donate to the Dancing in the Streets Arizona program in 2008.

Rodger's daughter painted a mural of dancing in the streets across a studio wall.

"If I can touch a kid's life, that is why I do what I do," Rodgers said just before he ran into a class to teach a group of eager dancers.



Since the studio is non-profit ... it's often difficult to provide all the necessary arrangements for these productions, even with a considerable number of sponsors.

Rodgers, left, coaching dancers during a rehearsal for annual Nutcracker production.

PHOTO: **ERIC SUHM, COURTESY OF SCOTT GRIESSEL AT CREATISTA.COM**

Story and photos
by Cecelia Marshall

The journey in a food desert

In flimsy plastic flip-flops, Brandie Fink lugged her plastic grocery bags down South Tucson's main street. It took her over an hour to walk only half a mile to the nearby Walgreens and back for her day's necessities.

Often, grocery shopping takes all day. Each day Fink must strategize how she shops. What can she afford? What groceries must she forfeit because they're too heavy to carry home? How can she get home quickest without perishables going bad?

Fink is a single mom raising two kids who is also facing a diagnosis of cancer. With no job and no child support, she receives governmental assistance including WIC, a supplemental nutrition program for women, infants and children, and food stamps, now known as SNAP. Each month, WIC provides her with checks for 14 cans of baby formula. That's 14 individual heavy cans she must get from Food City and carry home by herself.

For many Americans grocery shopping is a mundane, quick and easy errand. But for those, like Fink who live in "food deserts," it's a journey.

More than 23.5 million Americans, including some 700,000 Arizonans, are currently living in food deserts, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which defines a food desert as an area with little to no access to grocery stores offering fresh, healthy and affordable produce and other foods.

Food deserts dot the nation, from Californian suburbs to the Mississippi delta to parts of even the "Breadbasket of the Nation" in the Midwest. Sixty percent of Arizona's 153 food deserts in Arizona are in cities.

People in food deserts must turn to fast food restaurants and convenience stores, instead of large groceries.

Fink gets her fruits and vegetables from cans. She can't afford the bus that stops outside her home and would drop her off directly in front of the Food City parking lot, and even if she could, she says she could not afford the fresh produce there.

What's more, the journey would be difficult and cumbersome for her 19-year-old disabled son, who uses a wheelchair.

Every day Fink must walk back and forth to get enough food for her family. Sometimes she stocks up for a couple days, loading up her arms with bags of groceries. Other times, her arms are sore and she sacrifices convenience for price: choosing the $5 block of cheese from Circle K over the $1.50 identical cheese a mile down the road. In South Tucson, a city of almost 6,000 people in 1 square mile, there are plenty of restaurants, public buses and a Food City on the south end of town. But getting to Food City, which has fresh produce at good prices, is difficult for people like Fink.

More than half the residents of the community are below the poverty line, according to the 2011 census bureau. "Food is really expensive right now," said Sandra Hinojos-Cuen of the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona.

"For families on SNAP, the last week of the month is really hard," she said. "More and more people come [to the food bank] and get a food box right before they get their next month's SNAP benefits."

Packaged inside the boxes are rice, beans, cereal and peanut butter.

"It's a supplemental box. To call it a food box is stretching it," said Hinojos-Cuen.

Benefits like SNAP seem invaluable – unless you can't afford transportation.

"I have to always think to myself, 'How am I going to get this home?'" said Fink.

"It's a 45-minute walk one way," she said. "But that's only if I don't bring my 2-year-old or my 19-year-old son. Otherwise it's an hour walk down to Food City and an hour back."

Twice she has been stopped by South Tucson police and ticketed for taking a grocery cart past store premises. But for Fink, sometimes it's the only way.

"On my walks, I see little kids having to carry gallons of milk home for their families. It's just sad," said Fink.

On this day, Fink walked to Walgreens. She pulled out the sippy cups from a bag. Had she walked half a mile farther to Family Dollar, these sippy cups would have only cost $1.50. But she said she couldn't stay away from her sons for too long and instead spent $4 at Walgreens for the same product.

"It's hard even for people with cars because the gas prices are so high," said Fink.

Brian Flagg, director of South Tucson's Casa Maria Soup Kitchen, feeds hundreds of people every day. Although he says the food there may not be the healthiest or freshest, it fills the empty stomachs.

So how can a food desert transform into a food oasis?

The Obama administration set aside $400 million to attract grocery franchises like Safeway and Wal-Mart to food deserts to improve access and affordability. An agriculture department report to Congress in 2009 showed that food is priced 10 percent lower in big-box grocery stores than corner stores, farmers markets and food stands. Food deserts will be eliminated by 2017, the administration projects.

"It's who you know and what you know," said Hinojos-Cuen. The Community Food Bank offers resources and information on where to get food, she said.

People's attitude toward food and knowledge of nutrition also need to change, said Kelly Watters, the coordinator for Somos La Semilla, a network of local food providers trying to end hunger and encourage alternative methods of food growth.

In South Tucson schools such as Ochoa Community Magnet and Mission View Elementary are encouraging families and students to learn about food's healthy benefits and how to grow and prepare produce from their gardens.

"People don't have the same connection with the land as the past. People expect to get their groceries from supermarkets and don't know where it comes from," said Watters.

Along the main streets of South Tucson and within walking distance and bus route access are options like the community garden and the Garden Kitchen, which is a part of the UA cooperative extension. Its goal is to teach residents how to grow their own food, buy fresh produce, and cook fruits and vegetables in a low-cost way. It contains vegetable gardens, colorful scarecrows and indoor kitchens for cooking demonstrations.

Still, Fink says, it is an uphill struggle.

"People don't think about the small people here," said Fink.

"It's impossible but we make it possible because we need to get food home for our kids to eat," she said.

A FOOD DESERT

is an urban area where at least 500 residents and / or 33 percent or more of the census tract population live one or more miles from a grocery store. In a rural area, the distance is 10 miles. Over 23 million Americans, including 6.5 million children, live in food deserts.

Story and photos
By Cecelia Marshall
Traducido por Cinthia Guillén

En un desierto de comida

En chancletas, Brandie Fink baja la calle principal en el Sur de Tucson arrastrando sus bolsas de plástico del supermercado. Le tomó más de una hora para ir y venir del Walgreens cercano, que esta solo a media milla (aproximadamente 0.8 km), para comprar el mandado del día.

Usualmente se tarda todo el día para ir de compras al supermercado. Fink debe crear una estrategia todos los días para las compras. ¿Para qué le alcanza? ¿Cuáles comestibles debe dejar porque son muy pesados para cargarlos de regreso? ¿Cómo puede llegar a su casa lo más rápido posible para que no se le eche a perder la comida?

Fink es una madre soltera que está criando a dos niños y está enfrentando un diagnóstico de cáncer. Sin empleo y sin apoyo para los niños, ella recibe ayuda gubernamental incluyendo la ayuda de WIC (un programa de asistencia suplementaria de nutrición para mujeres, bebés y niños) y vales de dispensa, ahora conocidos como SNAP. WIC le provee cada mes con cheques para 14 latas de fórmula para bebé. Son 14 latas individuales pesadas que ella sola tiene que llevar de Food City hasta su casa.

Muchos americanos no tienen ningún problema para ir de compras al supermercado. Es un mandado rutinario rápido y fácil. Pero para personas como Fink que viven en "desiertos de comida", ir de compras al supermercado es una travesía.

Más de 23.5 millones de americanos están viviendo en un desierto de comida. Setecientos mil de estos son arizonenses. Según el Departamento de Agricultura de Estados Unidos, un desierto de comida se define como un área que tiene poco o nada de acceso a un supermercado que ofrezca comida fresca y económica que se necesita para mantener una dieta saludable. Sesenta por ciento de los 153 desiertos de comida en Arizona están en áreas urbanas como el Sur de Tucson.

Los desiertos de comida se encuentran por toda la nación, desde los suburbios en California al Delta de Mississippi, incluso en áreas de alta producción en Chicago.

Los que viven en los desiertos de comida deben acudir a los restaurantes de comida rápida y tiendas de abarrotes en vez de ir a los supermercados.

El consumo diario de frutas y vegetales de Fink viene enlatado. No le alcanza para tomar el camión que tiene una parada en frente de su casa y que la dejaría en frente del estacionamiento de Food City. Y aunque sí le alcanzara, dice que no le alcanza para comprar las frutas y verduras frescas de la tienda.

Además de eso, la travesía sería aun más difícil e incomodo para su hijo de 19 años que está incapacitado y utiliza silla de ruedas.

Fink debe caminar todos los días para comprar suficiente comida para su familia. A veces compra suficiente comida para varios días, cargándose los brazos con bolsas de comida. Otros días, sus brazos están tan adoloridos que sacrifica la comodidad por el precio. Escoge el bloque de queso que cuesta $5 en el Circle K en vez del mismo queso que cuesta $1.50 pero que esta a una milla (aproximadamente 1.6 km) de distancia.

En el Sur de Tucson, una ciudad de casi seis mil personas en una milla cuadrada hay suficientes restaurantes, camiones públicos y un Food City en el sur de la ciudad. Según el censo de 2010, alrededor de la mitad de los residentes de esta comunidad de una milla cuadrada están por debajo del umbral de la pobreza.

"La comida está muy cara actualmente", explicó Sandra Hinojos-Cuen del Banco de Alimentos Comunitario del sur de Arizona.

"Para las familias que tienen los beneficios SNAP, la última semana del mes es muy difícil", comentó Hinojos-Cuen. "Hay más y más gente que vienen [al banco de alimentos] a tomar una caja de comida justo antes de recibir sus beneficios SNAP del próximo mes".

La caja de alimentos contiene arroz, frijoles, cereal y mantequilla de maní. Pero la caja de alimentos no tiene nada de lo que se podría hacer una comida completa. SNAP no tiene normas sobre la nutrición de la comida que provee.

"Es una caja complementaria. Llamarla una caja de alimento es demasiado", aclaró Hinojos-Cuen.

Aunque se supone que los beneficios como SNAP ayudan, cuando no le alcanza a la gente para el transporte público, a veces se vuelven inútiles.

"Siempre tengo que pensar, '¿Cómo voy a llevarme esto a la casa?'" mencionó Fink.

"Es un viaje de 45 minutos caminando de ida y otros 45 minutos de venida. Pero solo si no traigo a mi hijo de 2 años o al de 19 años. Si alguno de ellos viene conmigo, nos tardamos una hora para caminar a Food City y otra hora para regresar".

La policía del Sur de Tucson ya la ha parado dos veces y le han dado infracciones por llevarse el carrito del supermercado más allá de las instalaciones de la tienda. Pero para Fink, a veces es la única opción.

"A veces durante mis caminatas, veo a niños chiquitos que tienen que cargar galones de leche pesados para sus familias. Es muy triste", articuló Fink.

Hoy, Fink tuvo que caminar a Walgreens. Tomó las tasitas entrenadoras que necesitaba comprar. Si hubiera elegido caminar

Frutas y verdura en los supermercados como Food City son más baratas que en tiendas pequeñas.

media milla más (aproximadamente .8) hasta Family Dollar, estas tasitas entrenadoras sólo le hubieran costado $1.50. Pero hoy no podía estar tanto tiempo alejada de sus hijos y entonces tuvo que gastar $4 por el mismo producto en Walgreens.

"Es difícil, aun para las personas que tienen carros, porque el precio de la gasolina está demasiado alto", explicó Fink.

Todos los días hay cientos de personas que hacen fila en el comedor para recibir comida de beneficencia en Casa María en el Sur de Tucson. Aunque la comida que sirven no es la más saludable o la más fresca, a las personas que vienen no les importa, solo buscan algo que comer, comenta Brian Flagg, director del comedor.

¿Entonces cómo se puede convertir un desierto de comida en un oasis de comida?

Un informe del Departamento de Agricultura de los Estados Unidos (USDA, por sus siglas en inglés) del 2009 al Congreso reveló que la comida es 10 por ciento más económica en los supermercados de mayoreo que en las tiendas de abarrotes, mercados de agricultores locales s y en los puestos de comida.

La administración de Obama apartó $400 millones para atraer a los supermercados como Safeway y Wal-Mart a desiertos de comida para aumentar el acceso a la comida. La administración calcula que para el 2017 los desiertos de comida serán eliminados.

"Hay que saber a quién recurrir", explicó Hinojos-Cuen. También informó que el Banco de Alimentos Comunitario le da a la gente suficientes recursos e información sobre dónde puede conseguir comida.

La actitud de la gente hacia la comida y lo que saben sobre nutrición también tiene que cambiar, dijo Kelly Watters, la coordinadora de Somos de las Semillas, una red de proveedores locales de comida que ayuda a proporcionarle a la gente recursos para acabar con el hambre y promueve métodos alternativos para cultivar la comida.

En las escuelas del Sur de Tucson como Ochoa Community Magnet y Mission View Elementary están alentando a las familias y a los estudiantes para que aprendan sobre los beneficios de la comida saludable y sobre como cultivar y preparar productos agrícolas desde sus jardines.

"La gente ya no tiene la misma conexión con la tierra como en el pasado. Ahora quieren comprar su comida de los supermercados y no saben de dónde viene", articuló Watters.

En las calles principales del Sur de Tucson y a una distancia lo suficientemente cercana para caminar y en las rutas del camión hay opciones más sostenibles como Garden Kitchen y Community Garden.

Garden Kitchen es parte de la extensión cooperativa de la Universidad de Arizona que tiene como objetivo enseñarle a la comunidad como cultivar su propia comida, comprar productos agrícolas frescos y cocinar las frutas y verduras de una manera económica. Garden Kitchen tiene jardines de vegetales, espantapájaros coloridos y cocinas para las clases de cocina.

Pero puede que estos esfuerzos no lleguen a todos.

"Nadie piensa en la gente humilde que vive aquí", afirmó Fink.

"Es imposible pero lo hacemos posible porque tenemos que llevar comida a la casa para que nuestros hijos tengan que comer", explicó Fink.

By Meaghan Fee
Photograph by Mariana Dale

Tasting from a local garden

The Arizona sun blares down on herbs and other crops peaking from the beds of soil, while chefs prepare fresh food in the kitchen. One by one, students fill the parking lot for their first gardening class of the spring. Black labels identify different plants. Spearmint, thyme, chocolate mint, purple sage and Mexican tarragon grow in the beds to the left; Anaheim peppers and strawberries are planted in blue plastic buckets to the right.

This is the Garden Kitchen, opened last October at the corner of 32nd Street and Fourth Avenue in South Tucson. A friendly staff of chefs and volunteers warmly welcomes the public to South Tucson's first community garden, where people from all over Pima County are encouraged to come take free cooking classes every Saturday and learn about healthy eating habits. Today's class is "Family Friendly Gardening," and of 18 students, more than half are children. The teacher begins with a short lesson about roots, then they harvest radishes and plant sunflower seeds.

Two brothers touch their noses to several buckets of herbs, drawing in the scents. A young child, dressed in plaid checkered shorts and a red Elmo hat, asks his mother to help him clean a radish he just hand-picked. An older woman in a straw hat uses her walker to move toward the shade. Jennifer Hernandez, former UA agriculture professor, was there with her son, Gabriel, 3. She heard about The Garden Kitchen at a Cyclovia event last month.

Carlos Babuca, 17, said he went to "the eggs class, a fish class, a baking class. We went home and used the recipe later, we made muffins."

Nick Kepasch, 22, and his younger brother Zach, 19, came from the north side of Tucson to take the class, held April 13. "It's so much easier to buy crops and grow your own food, I really think everyone is going to start gardening on their own soon," said Kepasch. "If you look at food labels, everything now has artificial coloring and things like aspartame. This is the way to go to take care of yourself."

The University of Arizona College of Agriculture and Life Sciences teamed up with Pima County and The City of South Tucson to create this public community center for anti-obesity and health awareness. "It is a teaching kitchen where we teach about healthy nutrition from seed to table. We grow food and veggies in the garden, and show people how to prepare them," said Dan McDonald, associate agent with the Pima County Cooperative Extension.

McDonald, who has a doctorate from the University of Arizona's Norton School, played a huge part in establishing The Garden Kitchen. "It serves the entire region of Pima County. We have events and health fairs. We have 'Fit 1st Saturdays,' which is a health event every first Saturday of the month," said McDonald.

A special Fit 1st Saturdays event, called "Salsa y Salsa," will celebrate Cinco de Mayo on May 4. The event will feature a salsa-making competition and salsa dancing class.

The Garden Kitchen runs with the help of volunteers, Schmidt said. "We have an instructional specialist who handles production when I'm not around, and 25 volunteers and interns."

Among them is Yael Greenblatt, research assistant and program coordinator, who teaches nutrition. "With our obesity issues, this is exactly what America needs to take care of themselves and stay healthy," she said..Another volunteer is Casey

Shaw, 25. “It’s about experiencing the connection between food and health first hand, being able to see and touch the food you’re eating,” said Shaw. “We’re targeting the people on food stamps. “The goal is to help those people and anyone else who wants to learn.”

The program coordinator and head chef, Cheralyn Schmidt, said: “People can watch a cooking show, eat the food, and ask questions at the same time…. It’s beautiful; we rarely do the same thing twice. If you don’t have a garden, you can come here. We call it budget gourmet. We focus on stretching your food dollar and spending a very little amount. It’s a myth that healthy food is more expensive.”

The kitchen is on the site of the former Lily’s Cocina, a Mexican restaurant that was closed because of Pima County health code requirements, McDonald said. “I

Elizabeth Mejias helps her daughter, Zayida, enjoy healthy snacks at The Garden Kitchen, where the audience learned how to make a sandwich-on-a-stick, a strawberry smoothie, and other fun snacks for children.

Christopher Molander, Nick Kepasch and other students harvest radishes from a garden plot at The Garden Kitchen.

knew Pima County had purchased an old restaurant," he said. "My understanding was that the Hell's Angels had wanted to make that a headquarters and that's why the city stepped in to purchased the building."

The renovation took 11 months, Schmidt said, and the kitchen opened last October.

It is funded partly through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP. It also serves as the base for the Pima County Cooperative Extension's nutrition education program.

McDonald, Schmidt and the team worked to get the word out. "We had a grand opening with advertisements all around" McDonald said. "We handed out the schedule and actually went door-to-door in South Tucson. Bilingual nutrition educators also go around the neighborhood."

Michelle Rico, an instructional specialist and nutrition educator at the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, visits community centers, stores and even elementary schools. "I have gone door-to-door around the neighborhood here to personally invite them," Rico said. "This is an arena for the community to come together. This is the foundation, the starting point."

Less than 5 months later, McDonald said, "it's a full house every weekend. Half people are from the neighborhood and half are from outside of South Tucson."

Visitors include college and elementary students, parents, teachers, and others. "All walks of life come here," Schmidt said, "I would say 30 to 50 percent of our students never miss a class. About 70 to 50 percent are brand new every single week."

Adrian Weaver, an early childhood education teacher in Tucson, takes her daughters, Violet, 5, and Lily, 8, to classes like "Chai Tea" and "Protein-Packed Snacks."

"I come to support healthy food for my own children and my students," Weaver said. "Cooking really should be a family adventure, a lifestyle."

Classes use only seasonal produce, either local or grown on-site. "During the cold we grow a lot of root crops, radishes, carrot, kale, lettuces. During the spring we'll start tomatoes, cucumbers, peas, and we'll protect them in the green house," said Schmidt.

The chefs at The Garden Kitchen write most of the class recipes from scratch, and students get all the information they need for cooking at each lesson.

"It's about getting your children excited to be in the kitchen with you," said Rico, who is a mother of three and a grandmother of seven. "Please take the time to cook with love and passion. We're not just making food for your stomach, we're making food for your soul."

Ruiz's opened in 1989 to sell low-rider rims to customers, then expanded to other types of rims, as well as other services. The shop is now run by Jerry Ruiz, who started working in his father's shop at age 8.

Dressing up the wheels

Here in South Tucson, it seems that no matter the style or the age of the car, owners enjoy showcasing glamorous rims on their wheels. It's part of a culture of individual expression and pride that started in the 1920s with the early years of car manufacturing. As the years progressed, the styles and customs changed. Small rims transformed into bigger rims.

"It represents you," said Jerry Ruiz, owner of Ruiz Complete Tire & Wheel Service & Accessories. "They don't all want the same style rim. Everyone wants a specific style."

When Ruiz first started at his father's shop, in 1992 at 8 years old, most people bought 13-inch low-rider rims, small enough so that the rims would not spin off the low-rider cars, which are built with hydraulics to lower the rear end inches from the ground. Today, 22-inch rims are more popular, he said.

"We're in a different generation where a lot of people want big rims," he said. "The bigger they have the better they are, I guess."

Fernando Acosta, a South Tucson native, has been working on his Chevrolet Caprice Classic for about 8 months. After he getting that car to start, the second most important priority was a set of 100 Spoke Dayton rims. With today's economy it is difficult to head to the local shop and spend $450 on a brand new set, he said. That is why his brother sold him a $250 set.

He said his work in progress needs a paint job, but he is proud of it. As a youngster, he grew up admiring the cars in the neighborhood. He jokes as he says that growing up he learned about cars because he was a "metiche," or a nosy kid.

"I thought they were the greatest thing ever," said Acosta. He remembers thinking it's not every day a bouncing car drives by. "It's part of my lifestyle," he said.

PHOTO: JENNIFER CORDOVA

SOS

'Save Our Schools'

By Rachel Cabakoff
Photograph by Mariana Dale

South Tucson schools again made an appearance on the school closures list, and the South Tucson community fought for their schools once again this spring. The community has a history of activism. On a spring day in 2008, a human chain of 800 parents, teachers, students and residents formed around Ochoa Community Magnet School chanting: "We're not leaving."

They wore shirts, signs and buttons with the phrase, "SOS – Save Ochoa School."

Inside the school that day, the Tucson Unified School District Governing Board was deciding whether to close Ochoa.

The protest worked. The school stayed open.

This was the beginning of South Tucson's mobilization to save schools. Last year, when Ochoa's name reappeared on the school closings list, more than 700 members of the South Tucson community packed a TUSD meeting at the El Casino Ballroom. They presented their stories and their reasons to keep Ochoa and Mission View Elementary open.

Once again, the board members took the schools off of the list. "I think it's important that the community advocates and they were effective in doing that," said Adelita Grijalva, president of TUSD governing board. "The fact that most of those students walk to school these are really neighborhood children and it is growing."

One of the many active volunteers during the school closures, Jimmy Ojeda has a daughter who was beginning kindergarten at Ochoa.

"We really made an impact on the board members," he said. "They said they wouldn't touch the schools because they were afraid of what the community would do – the power of us being organized and able to save Mission View and Ochoa."

Meg Cota has been the principal of Mission View Elementary for two years and has seen the beginning of South Tucson's community efforts only grow and become rooted in the community.

"It was very touching to see how these students, families and community came together. It's always nice when people go that extra mile and will fight for you," Cota said.

How did this movement to save the South Tucson schools begin?

Mari Fuentes, a volunteer at Casa Maria and a mother of three sons who went to Ochoa in 2012, was one of the many active parents involved. When she heard about the possibility of Ochoa's closing, she reached out to Brian Flagg, a founder of Casa Maria and a community organizer, for help.

"I was very involved going to the meetings and always knowing what was going on," Fuentes said. "Because I was a volunteer at Casa Maria and I knew Brian was very active and he has helped everybody."

Residents like Fuentes share their problems with him, and he helps them figure out what to do to fix them.

"You talk to people and ask them, what is a barrier to them?" Flagg said. "We work in this neighborhood a lot. We get to know them, everything is really based here."

"Fuentes challenged me and came to me asking for help with the schools," he said. "We don't cry and moan about it. We try and do something about it."

A flame was ignited.

They started circulating flyers to inform the community of the potential closings of Hollinger and Pueblo Gardens schools, asking for support.

Dozens of parents, residents and children started attending the board meetings and having monthly meetings with the South Tucson mayor, city manager, representatives at the John Valenzuela Youth Center and the Primavera Foundation.

Another key leader was Gloria Hamelitz, the Valenzuela center's youth director, who provided a place for meetings and helped share information.

Paula McPheeters, pre-kinder teacher at Ochoa, who has been involved in TUSD for more than 20 years, also joined the

Members and supporters of Unidos protest the closing of 10 schools outside the Tucson Unified School District's administrative offices in April.

fight.

"The beautiful thing as a teacher at Ochoa is that I have a lot of parent participation in my classroom, and we can help organize around causes that affect children and families in the neighborhood," McPheeters said.

McPheeters works closely with parents to build a stronger education program that incorporates the home and the school into one.

"Paula is a key leader in that she knows a lot of parents," Ojeda said. "She helped us when we had our first meeting with some key parents. She has been involved from the beginning."

Although South Tucson has survived two separate attempts to close its schools, there is still a possibility of future closings. Now, with a $17 million budget deficit, TUSD has been forced to consolidate classrooms, cut staff and look for other savings as state funding is cut for under-enrolled schools.

"You'd like to see a school between 85 and 90 percent of their capacity. These are small schools. Ochoa is under 400 students, and enrollment has been about 260 for some years," Grijalva said.

Poorly performing schools are usually targeted. Their score of A to F is based on the state's AIMS reading and math tests, as well as whether their students made improvements from previous years. Ochoa is a D school, and TUSD has announced that its principal, Heidi Aranda, has not had her contract renewed for next year. She could be rehired only if performance next year improves, officials said.

Still, South Tucson reaches out to fight for its schools.

"Were all trying to figure it out," Flagg said. "There is money. It's an attack on public education; it's an attack on our poor people. There is nothing more important than having education for poor people."

Grijalva's own daughter went to pre-school at Ochoa and she is familiar with the significance of the school.

"I keep talking to the community members saying I know you love your school," she said, "but unless they have extra resources and are successful in implementing a charter idea or figuring out a different way, they will always be on the list because even at full capacity they are still a small school."

While South Tucson escaped closings this round, residents, parents and teachers worry about next year.

"I think everyone here believes it's just a matter of time," McPheeters said. "What we don't want to do is sit around and think that we don't need to be actively involved because it wont happen next year. Realizing how quickly time passes and how critical it is for families to be engaged in their child's education. It's the life of the school as well as the life of the district."

SOS

'Salven Nuestras Escuelas'

By Rachel Cabakoff
Fotografías por Mariana Dale
Traducido por Lucía Cortés

Una cadena humana de más de 800 padres de familia, maestros, estudiantes y residentes se formó en torno a la escuela Ochoa Community Magnet coreando:

"No nos iremos."

Ellos portaban camisetas, letreros y prendedores con la frase, "SOS —Salven a la escuela Ochoa" (Save Ochoa School).

Dentro de la escuela, esa primavera, el Consejo del Distrito Escolar Unificado de Tucson (TUSD Governing Board) decidía si cerraba la escuela Ochoa.

La protesta del 2008 funcionó. Las escuelas permanecieron abiertas.

Este fue el comienzo de la movilización del Sur de Tucson para salvar a las escuelas. Así que el año pasado, cuando el nombre de Ochoa volvió a aparecer en la lista de escuelas por cerrar, más de 700 miembros de la comunidad del Sur de Tucson se reunieron en una junta de TUSD en El Casino Ballroom. Ellos presentaron sus historias y razones para mantener abiertas las escuelas Ochoa y Mission View Elementary.

Una vez más, los miembros de la mesa directiva quitaron de la lista los nombres de las escuelas.

"Yo pienso que es importante que la comunidad interceda por la causa, en lo cual fueron efectivos. El hecho que la mayoría de los estudiantes caminan a la escuela demuestra que son niños del barrio y esto va en aumento", dijo Adelita Grijalva, presidenta del Consejo de TUSD.

Jimmy Ojeda, uno de los muchos voluntarios activos durante los cierres de escuelas, tiene una hija que asiste al jardín de niños en la escuela Ochoa y también ayuda en Casa María.

"Nosotros realmente causamos un impacto en los miembros de la mesa directiva," él expresó. "Ellos dijeron que no tocarían a las escuelas porque temían de lo que pudiera hacer la comunidad. Este es el poder de estar organizados y ser capaces de salvar a las escuelas Mission View y Ochoa."

Meg Cota ha sido la directora de Mission View Elementary por dos años y solo ha visto el inicio del crecimiento de los esfuerzos de la comunidad del Sur de Tucson. Ella se sorprendió con la respuesta de la comunidad al querer salvar sus escuelas.

"Fue muy conmovedor ver cómo estos estudiantes, familias y la comunidad se unieron. Siempre es bueno ver cómo la gente va un paso más allá y lucha por uno", agregó Cota.

¿Cómo empezó este movimiento de salvar a las escuelas del Sur de Tucson?

Mari Fuentes, voluntaria en Casa María y madre de tres hijos quienes asistieron a la escuela Ochoa en el 2012, fue una de los muchos padres activos e involucrados. Cuando ella escuchó sobre la posibilidad del cierre de Ochoa, buscó ayuda con Brian Flagg, un fundador de Casa María y líder de la comunidad.

"Yo estaba muy involucrada al ir a las juntas y siempre estaba al corriente de lo que estaba pasando. Yo era voluntaria en Casa María y sabía que Brian era muy activo y siempre ayudaba a todos. Por lo cual vine a pedirle ayuda", replicó Fuentes.

Residentes como Fuentes comparten sus problemas, lo que quieren hacer para arreglarlos y Flagg les ayuda a realizar estos cambios.

"Hablo con la gente y les pregunto, ¿qué es un obstáculo para usted? Nosotros trabajamos mucho en esta vecindad [y] llegamos a conocerlos bien, todo está basado en esta vecindad", dijo Flagg. "Fuentes me retó y me vino a pedir ayuda con las escuelas. Nosotros no lloramos ni nos quejamos de ello. Tratamos de hacer algo al respecto".

Se encendió una llama.

Empezaron a circular volantes para informar a la comunidad sobre los cierres potenciales de las escuelas Hollinger y Pueblo Gardens, para pedir su apoyo. Docenas de padres, residentes y niños comenzaron a asistir a las juntas de la mesa directiva y a tener juntas mensuales con el alcalde del Sur de Tucson, el administrador de la ciudad y los representantes de John Valenzuela Youth Center y Primavera Foundation.

"Para la comunidad, la necesidad de escuelas es muy importante porque proporcionan algo más que solo la educación para los niños", agregó Ojeda. "El cerrar las escuelas significaría más violencia, drogas y mucho más crimen en los barrios".

Otros líderes en éste movimiento incluyen a Gloria Hamelitz, la directora del programa juvenil de John Valenzuela, quien proveyó un lugar para las juntas y ayudó a difundir información. También se involucró Paula McPheeters, maestra de pre-kinder en Ochoa, quien ha estado involucrada de TUSD por más de 20 años.

"Lo bello de ser maestro en la escuela Ochoa es que hay mucha

Presidenta del Consejo de Distrito Escolar Unificado de Tucson Adelita Grijalva durante una reunión del Consejo en Abril. Su hija asistió al pre-escolar en la escuela Ochoa.

participación de los padres de familia en mi salón de clases y podemos ayudar a organizar en torno a las problemas que afectan a los niños y familias en el vecindario", dijo McPheeters.

McPheeters trabaja en estrecha colaboración con los padres para construir un programa de educación más fuerte que fusione al hogar y a la escuela en uno solo.

"Paula es una líder clave ya que ella conoce a muchos padres de familia. Ella sabe mucho de lo que está sucediendo en las escuelas y nos ayudó cuando tuvimos nuestra primera junta con algunos padres clave", explicó Ojeda. "Ella ha estado involucrada desde el principio".

A pesar de que el Sur de Tucson sobrevivió a dos diferentes intentos de clausura cuando sus escuelas fueron evaluadas, aún hay una posibilidad de cierre en el futuro. Ahora, con un déficit de $17 millones de dólares en el presupuesto, TUSD se ha visto obligado a hacer cambios drásticos a causa de los recortes de fondos estatales por las bajas inscripciones en las escuelas.

"Lo ideal es que una escuela llegue a 85 a 90 por ciento de su capacidad. Estas son escuelas pequeñas, Ochoa se encuentra por debajo de los 400 estudiantes y las inscripciones han sido cerca de 260 alumnos algunos años," dijo Grijalva.

Las escuelas con bajo rendimiento suelen ser el blanco de clausura. Su puntuación de A a F se basa en los exámenes estatales AIMS de lectura y matemáticas, y también si sus estudiantes mostraron mejorías comparado con los años anteriores. Ochoa es una escuela con un promedio de D, y TUSD ha anunciado que su directora, Heidi Aranda, no puede ser contratada nuevamente si en el año siguiente el desempeño sigue rezagándose.

De todas maneras, la comunidad del Sur de Tucson no para de luchar por sus escuelas. "Todos estamos tratando de encontrar una solución", agregó Flagg. "Hay dinero. Es un ataque a la educación pública; es un ataque a nuestra gente de bajos recursos. No hay nada más importante que tener educación para nuestra gente humilde".

La propia hija de Grijalva asistió al pre-escolar en la escuela Ochoa y ella entiende el significado de la escuela.

"Sigo hablando con los miembros de la comunidad diciéndoles que yo sé que aman a su escuela, pero a menos que tengan recursos adicionales, a menos que tengan éxito en convertirse en una escuela subvencionada o que encuentren un camino diferente, siempre van a estar en la lista porque incluso a plena capacidad siguen siendo una escuela pequeña", replicó Grijalva.

Mientras que el Sur de Tucson escapó a los cierres en esta ronda, los residentes, los padres de familia y los maestros se preocupan por el año que viene.

"Yo pienso que todos aquí creen que sólo es cuestión de tiempo", dijo McPheeters. "Lo que no queremos hacer es quedarnos sentados y pensar que no necesitamos estar activamente involucrados porque quizá no pase el siguiente año. Sino darnos cuenta de lo rápido que pasa el tiempo y lo crucial que es para las familias el estar comprometidos en la educación de sus hijos, la vida de la escuela así como también la vida del distrito".

Story and photo
by Mariana Dale

As their school is shuttered, a family worries about future

Blanca Hidalgo and her husband always make sure someone drives their son Daniel to Wakefield Middle School in the morning. Two days a week he stays late for math and reading tutoring.

But next year, when Daniel starts the seventh grade, Hidalgo doesn't know which school he will attend.

"Every day is one less day the school is going to be open," Hidalgo said.

Teachers at Wakefield are also waiting for answers from the district. Mark Romero is a language arts teacher who has been at Wakefield for more than a decade. He said he received a survey from the district about where he would like to work next year, but there hadn't been any follow up.

"I have to think about my family. I have to think about where I live, if it's feasible," Romero said.

Wakefield and 10 other Tucson Unified School District schools will be closed at the end of the year to help relieve a $17 million budget deficit.

Wakefield's 427 students will be dispersed to other schools. When Hidalgo researched her choices, she became concerned. She might have to send her son to Utterback Middle School or Safford K-8, and both schools received an academic rating of D in the 2011-2012 school year, which means they are performing poorly on state tests and on academic improvements.

Ironically, Daniel's current school, Wakefield, increased passing rates on the reading, writing and math AIMS tests in 2011-12, boosting the school's grade to a C from a D.

"The teachers and the students worked very hard to bring those grades up," Hidalgo said. "It's a message they are sending to the kids that hard work doesn't pay off."

In April, Hidalgo and about 50 other Wakefield students and families listened to Utterback and Hollinger staff present the options available at their schools.

Utterback emphasized their performing arts program, where students can choose from a variety of electives and perform for the community.

"I know how important it is for the families to get a warm welcome, and the kids too," Utterback Principal Cindy Shepard-Mady said.

She has collaborated with Wakefield to set up field trips to her school and a pen-pal program between Wakefield and Utterback students. At the end of the year, Utterback will have nine teaching positions open. Shepard-Mady said she will work with TUSD human resources to place Wakefield teachers in those spots.

Hollinger Principal Kathy Bolles said her school's focus is on academics. Hollinger Elementary currently serves kindergarten through fifth grade. Bolles said they have enough space to accommodate new Wakefield students, but their program offerings for older students are not as expansive as other district middle schools.

For the first year, middle school students will only have a single teacher, instead of rotating classrooms like they would have at a traditional middle school.

"I can't do anything unless I know exactly more or less a count of who's going to go," Bolles said.

Before the meeting, Hidalgo was set to send her son to Hollinger, based on their B grade but she was dismayed by the lack of information presented.

"I was dead set to send him there, but I don't think we are going to have a welcoming community there," Hidalgo said.

She is concerned that Daniel, a special education student, won't move forward in a school that is transitioning to serve older students.

"I want him to go forward not backwards," Hidalgo said.

TUSD extended the open enrollment deadline from Dec.10 to Jan. 31 in order to give parents more time to research options, said Noreen Wiedenfeld, the director of school community services.

"We've seen a slight bump in applications," Wiedenfeld said.

The district runs a lottery to determine which students will be placed first. Parents receive a letter in the mail indicating whether they got their first, second or third choice. Placements usually continue through the summer, Wiedenfeld said.

"It's not a room issue. It's more a programmatic and academic

Blanca Hidalgo shakes hands with her son Daniel's teacher, David Paun, at Wakefield Middle School. Daniel, center, stays after school twice a week for reading and writing.

issue," said Bryant Nodine, a TUSD planning manager, at a governing board meeting in February.

Members of the board and Superintendent John Pedicone felt that students should have the option to attend Hollinger from the beginning.

"Wakefield and Hollinger's academics are very close," said Adelita S. Grijalva, TUSD board president. "I think it would behoove us to work with the community and keep that commitment."

In addition to parents, homeowners near Wakefield are concerned about the school's closing.

"One of the things that glues the community together to make it a safe, healthy and sustainable state are schools, " said Luis Perales, an educator and co-founder of the Tierra y Libertad Organization, a grassroots group in Tucson. Wakefield's grounds are currently home to a community garden Tierra y Libertad helped build and a soccer league. Nodine says the school's grounds will remain open, even though the buildings will be locked. "Our interest is in keeping as much open as possible," Nodine said.

For everyone involved, the uncertainties are wearing. Hidalgo said that every day for months she has waited for word from the district about Daniel's future.

"Right now I want to scream but my son is here and I need to set an example for him," Hidalgo said. "I'll have to do more digging."

En Español

Blanca Hidalgo y su esposo se aseguran que alguien lleve a su hijo Daniel a Wakefield Middle School todas las mañanas. Los martes y los jueves se queda después de la escuela para tutoría en matemáticas y lectura. Hidalgo no sabe a cuál escuela va a llevar a Daniel el próximo año cuando empiece su segundo año en la secundaria.

Los maestros tambíen están esperando la respuesta del distrito escolar. Mark Romeo es un maestro de artes y letras y ha trabajado en Wakefield por mas de una década. Èl dijo que recibió un sondeo del distrito escolar de donde iba a trabajar el próximo año pero no ha tenido seguimiento. "Tengo que pensar en mi mi familia. Tengo que pensar donde vivo, si es viable," dijo Romero.

Wakefield, junto con otras 10 escuelas del Distrito Escolar Unificado de Tucson (TUSD), cerrarán al final del año escolar para ayudar a mitigar el déficit presupuestario de $17 millones. Los 427 estudiantes de Wakefield serán incorporados a otras escuelas, Quizá tendrá que mandar su hijo a Utterback Middle School o a Safford K-8 y ambas escuelas recibieron una calificación académica de ´D´ en el año escolar 2011-2012, lo que significa que su desempeño es muy bajo en el mejoramiento y en los exámenes estatales.

Irónicamente, la escuela actual de Daniel, Wakefield, aumentó su índice de aprobación en los exámenes AIMS (examen estándar utilizado en Arizona para medir el conocimiento de los estudiantes) en lectura, escritura y matemáticas, aumentando la calificación de la escuela de una ´D´ a una ´C´.

Para más de este artículo, sigue al sitio web: elindenews.com

Story and photo
by Mariana Dale

Overhaul for a targeted school

In the Ochoa Community Magnet School courtyard, an abstract metal and copper statue rises in a rigid wall, then curves at the top. Principal Heidi Aranda said the sculpture symbolizes one of the school's mantras: turning walls into bridges.

The Tucson Unified School District governing board has tried to close the historic South Tucson elementary school twice in the last five years; once in 2008 and more recently in 2012.

"The reality about Ochoa is our enrollment is low," Aranda told the staff after the first attempted closure. "So let's think about how can we increase enrollment at Ochoa."

Aranda and the teachers discussed adding specialized math, science and bilingual programs. In the end, the staff decided to put together a proposal to incorporate the Reggio Emilia approach.

"It's not a method and it's not a curriculum," explained Ochoa pedagogista Mimi Gray. "It's more a set of values and beliefs."

The Reggio Emilia approach operates on the belief that all children are capable learners. Materials, movement, music and nature are a part of the learning process. Teachers emphasize the importance of critical thinking, and they base lessons on student interest.

"You have to build your own knowledge. It's not poured into your head," Gray said. "They (students) have to build their own understanding of the world."

TUSD is grappling with a $17 million budget deficit for the upcoming school year. The board voted to close 11 schools and consolidate administrative positions. Schools like Ochoa will also feel the pinch.

"We're looking right now at a huge budget deficit for Ochoa," Aranda said. "We will have a third of what we had in funding next year."

Aranda has listed the budget deficiencies and vulnerable positions at the school in green marker on a giant sticky note stuck to the back of her office door.

In addition to district-wide cuts, a federal magnet grant that has given the school a $200,000 to $300,000 budget boost for the last three years ends Sept. 30, 2013.

Ochoa is small with about 230 students and has had low levels of academic achievement. For the last two years, Ochoa has received a D grade, which is underperforming. These evaluations are based largely on the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards, or AIMS, test scores for the current year and the improvements from previous years.

State records show more than 94 percent of the children at Ochoa qualify for free or reduced meals.

"Because of the poverty there are already so many difficulties in our students lives that having a community school enriches the school experience for them," Aranda said.

Aranda, principal at Ochoa since 2003, is no stranger to the school's challenges. Before she became the principal, she worked for TUSD as the school improvement facilitator for Ochoa.

Teachers at Ochoa regularly administer what Aranda calls "dipstick" tests to gauge student performance throughout the year. When the AIMS begins on April 15 teachers have a good idea of where students struggle.

"We know we have this group of kids that need just a little bit of extra help," Aranda said.

Many of these students attended AIMS Academy during TUSD's spring break to prepare for the mid-April tests.

AIMS tests students in three areas – reading, writing and math. Ochoa performs below the TUSD average on all. Math and writing scores both gained a few percentage points in the past two years, but progress is slow.

Partly because of these standards, Ochoa still maintains a designated math time in an otherwise integrated class schedule.

"There are things that kids need to know because that isn't going to come up naturally," Aranda said.

Ochoa's largest percentage of success is in the reading portion with 58.8 percent of students passing, but measure still falls below the TUSD average of 72.4 percent.

"They're not where we want them to be but they're on their way," Aranda said.

Next year, a revised state law, dubbed "Move on When Reading," will require students to prove they can read at a third grade level on the AIMS exam before they advance to fourth grade.

Also starting in the fall, Arizona will finish implementing Common Core, a new set of curriculum for K-12 public schools. The standards include guidelines for teaching math and English language arts.

"Of any standards it is probably more applicable to the Reggio approach," Aranda said. "When they came from the state, they said we are a step ahead when it comes to the Common Core."

The Common Core stresses integration, an idea already deeply ingrained in the Reggio approach. Students will have to pass a new standardized test based on Common Core standards.

"What it begs is for teachers to have a solid understanding of what those standards are," Aranda said.

Each new teacher hired at Ochoa integrates the values of Reggio into their practice.

When Alfredo Villegas was hired as a music teacher in 2008, his room was standard. He had never worked with the Reggio approach. After learning about Reggio Emilia, he was inspired to create a unique music studio from recycled materials. (For more pictures, visit elindenews.com)

"Most people think that music just needs to be three minutes of playing but it's not," Villegas said. "We can't see music, we can't see sounds. So what would it look like if a child was to see a sound?"

When students file through the door, they crowd around an end table covered with magnets with each student's face on it. They fix their magnet to a metal strip that corresponds to the area they want to explore.

On a Friday in March, there is a cacophony of metallic banging and sharp tapping playing over the melodic vibrations of the xylophone. Students don goggles and gloves to beat on cymbals, aluminum cans and springs nailed to the wall.

"It's a place where students come to research and learn in more profound ways," Villegas said. "If you think about a library it's the same here. "

One student asked Villegas why the xylophones did not have every letter of the alphabet. Villegas encouraged him to draw out what he imagined that instrument would look like with every letter.

Projects like this incorporate language and math skills into the studio, Villegas said.

"That's what I try doing, linking up their experience with what they are doing in the classroom," Villegas said.

Though Villegas naturally adds to and expands on the Reggio approach in his music studio, the experience is not the same for each teacher.

"Teachers with more seniority sometimes have difficulty incorporating the less rigid style into their teaching," Aranda said. "As teachers you come in and we know as a fourth grader you need to learn about Arizona this year."

This is where Ochoa's support system comes in. Mimi Gray and several other pedagogistas have studied the Reggio approach extensively.

Ylianna Velarde taps out a percussive beat on the sound wall in Alfredo Villegas's studio at Ochoa Community Magnet School.

"We are focused on organization," Gray said. "We are thinking about presenting information. We construct the learning day and environment."

These positions were largely funded by the extra dollars from the magnet grant.

With the expiration approaching and other cuts beginning, it may be impossible to fund several of these supportive roles, Aranda said.

"How will we keep our study of Reggio going?" Aranda questioned. "What will it mean?"

She said the solution lies in continuing discussion with teachers, parents and students at Ochoa. After-school enrichment programs might have to supplement to the school day to keep their study of Reggio Emilia alive.

In April, the TUSD Governing Board voted not to renew the contracts of 23 administrators, including Aranda.

Aranda , Mark Alvarez of Manzo Elementary and Rex Scott of Catalina Magnet High School could lose their jobs because their schools received D grades for two consecutive years.

"The bottom line is that we have an obligation to ensure that our students are performing on the AIMS test as well as other assessments," Superintendent John Pedicone said. "Students who do not perform are disadvantaged in their journey throughout our schools."

If Ochoa shows improvement in this year's AIMS scores, the board could offer Aranda her job back. Aranda said she understands the board's decision and will continue to work at student success.

"We have a school year to finish and regardless of anything and of any circumstances we are going to continue to provide the best," Aranda said.

She's 'always dancing'

Story and photo
By Cecelia Marshall

Meg Cota pulls off the main street of South Tucson and into the quiet haven of the neighborhood surrounding her school, Mission View Elementary. It's dark still, with the sun just now peaking over the Rincon Mountains. She passes the new playground she helped establish and dedicate last year, mists of dew gleaming on the monkey bars. It won't be long until the playground is filled with 300 dancing children, following the choreography led by her and other faculty.

As she turns into the parking lot, she passes the lighted Mission View sign with the motto: "Dream it. Achieve it!"

It is another day of learning and growing at Mission View. As a first-generation American with a humble upbringing in a Spanish-speaking family, Cota experienced growth in spite of challenges, connecting her further to the South Tucson community and students.

With a school of over 300 students, she knows everyone by face, if not name. Cota seems to be everywhere during the day. And it's a common sight to see her busting a move. "I'm always dancing!" said Cota. She often tucks her heels under her desk and puts on tennis shoes so she can be more active.

"You always see her in the hallways greeting students and families in the morning. She makes her presence known," said Yvette Leon, a special education teacher.

"Flash Mob Friday" is a favorite activity. All classes, grades kindergarten through fifth grade, rush outside to the playground to dance the "Macarena," the "Gummy Bear Song" and "Electric Slide." Even the youngest students find it easy to pick up these dances.

Though not interacting with the kids every day like teachers do, she still makes a point to visit classes and check in with the kids who run up to her to share stories and give her hugs. "When I'm having a bad day, I don't stay in my office. I go out to the classrooms because they hug you and want to share everything with you," Cota said.

When it comes time for assemblies or school events, Cota will help set up chairs, wipe down tables and move furniture.

"They're little things but it shows that you're committed to a place," she said.

Once again this year, Mission View was on TUSD's chopping block. The school district board closed 11 schools in the district and Mission View was going to be one of them. With relief from the community, they escaped the ax in the end but who knows their future next year.

With events such as last month's Healthy Habits Community Fair held at the elementary school, Cota is encouraged by the community response and attendance, which exemplifies to the board members just how much the elementary school is treasured. If not by numbers, it is by heart.

"It's hard not to become emotionally attached to your school. We have a really good team here," she said.

Cota is also a "product of the TUSD" system when it was more vibrant and had a better budget. She was born in Tucson, near the University of Arizona and attended Blenman Elementary, Doolen Middle and Catalina High.

Back when she started school, her only language was Spanish. Her parents were from Chihuahua, Mexico, and their philosophy was "to fit in, you need to learn English because it's a privilege to be in this country," Cota said.

Starting school meant complete immersion into the English language. "Sink or swim," she said.

When Cota got into teaching, she was able to use her experience learning English to her advantage. She helped children from migrant families interpret for their parents and eventually help them teach their parents English.

Cota didn't consider applying for the principal job until the application deadline. Her mentors in the district encouraged her though Cota wanted to remain at Maxwell Middle School where she had spent over a year rebuilding.

"You need to go. I love working with you but you need to go," said her principal at Maxwell Middle School, according to Cota.

Yvette Leon first interviewed Cota for the position. From Cota's past experience at schools, the level of commitment and passion she had for her students and families was genuine. It was exactly what Mission View and South Tucson was looking for in a principal.

Cota enters new schools with the mantra, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." The principal, Elizabeth Redondo, who preceded her at Mission View was beloved. She carried respect among the parents and teachers and built the school to what it was.

But it didn't take long for Cota to be welcomed by people.

"She was quickly accepted by parents and staff and played important roles as soon as she stepped in," said Sharon Hering, Cota's instructional coach for the past two years.

She has helped create a safe haven for the community at Mission View, especially parents.

Meg Cota helps students plant mesquite trees. She said she has one of the best jobs and makes point to check with the chilren daily.

Many parents in South Tucson lost jobs when the 2008 recession hit. Commonly, you will see people lounging in their yards during the day or on their porch. For parents like Connie Garcia, many have given their free time to Mission View.

Tucked in the back near the cafeteria is the "Parent's Room". Each day parents come with their breakfasts and lunches after dropping off their kids at class and begin on the crafts or projects needed for that day.

Like Connie Garcia, parents understand the value of being active in their kid's school. It keeps them focused, engaged and learning.

Mission View has a rather high mobility rate which means students are constantly either dropping out, or being taken out of school by relatives.

"We have a revolving door. We gain and lose students weekly," Cota said. "But they usually all return later in the next year or so."

She still plays a dynamic role in the South Tucson community. Though Cota leads many South Tucson projects, she credits her members for getting so many things done. Whenever she is praised for her efforts, such as South Tucson's Healthy Habits task force meeting, she smiles humbly and remarks, "It was a team effort."

But it was her initiative that helped construct a brand new playground last January with a grant the city received. Cota constructed a team that completed the project quickly and a dedication ceremony involving all of South Tucson. Now, on a sunny day you can see families with their kids climbing all around it.

Cota is known for attending all South Tucson community meetings, events and is always willing to host gatherings at her school. Though Cota places her importance, time and energy into Mission View, she not only gives the last of her energy to the South Tucson community but into furthering her education as well.

"Free time? What's that?" she asked. Depending on what needs to be done, Cota spends long hours at the school. She still tries to keep a balance with her family, including son and daughter, and friends on her off days. Not surprising though, Cota likes music and busting a move even away from school.

"I'm glad my friends, my family and my past principal pushed me to do it," she said.

A school is the heart of a community. It is the living room to a home and an oasis to a fortress.

"At this school we try to be that haven," she said.

For years, Mission View has been all of these for the people of South Tucson. Yet, the essences of this school would be nothing without the presence and involvement of Principal Meg Cota.

"I've been a part of many TUSD communities and this is the first time I've felt 'this!' " she said.

Siempre bailando

Story and photo
By Cecelia Marshall
Traducido por Lizbeth Feria

Meg Cota entra por la calle principal del Sur de Tucson y pasa por el barrio tranquilo y seguro que rodea su escuela, Mission View Elementary.

Mientras el sol se asoma sobre las montañas Rincon, ella ve las gotas de rocío que brillan sobre el pasamanos y las resbaladillas del patio de juegos que ella misma ayudó a construir e inaugurar el año pasado. No pasará mucho tiempo antes de que este patio se llene de 300 niños bailando siguiendo su coreografía y la de otros maestros.

Al dar la vuelta en el estacionamiento, ella pasa por el letrero iluminado de Mountain View con el lema "Dream it. Achieve it!" (¡Suéñalo! ¡Lógralo!)

Es otro día para aprender y crecer en Mission View. Siendo una estadounidense de primera generación y criada en un hogar humilde y de habla hispana, Cota siente un fuerte vínculo con los estudiantes y la comunidad del Sur de Tucson.

Ella conoce a todos sus 300 estudiantes de vista, y a algunos hasta por su nombre. Cota parece estar en todas partes, y es común verla dando un bailecito en los pasillos de la escuela.

"¡Siempre estoy bailando!", exclama Cota.

A menudo pone sus zapatillas debajo de su escritorio y se pone zapatos deportivos para poder estar más cómoda y ser más activa.

"Por la mañana siempre la ves en los pasillos saludando a los estudiantes y a los padres de familia. Ella siempre se hace presente", menciona Yvette León, una de las maestras de educación especial.

Mission View es una escuela que siempre se mantiene activa, no solamente en lo académico, pero también en lo físico. "Flash Mob Friday" ("Movilización relámpago" que es un baile sincronizado hecho por un grupo de personas) es una de las actividades favoritas de los alumnos. Todos los estudiantes desde pre-escolar hasta quinto grado, corren hacia el patio para bailar la "Macarena", "Gummy Bear Song" y "Electric Slide". Hasta los estudiantes más pequeños aprenden estos bailes fácilmente.

"Esperamos enseñarles los bailes "Boot Scootin' Boogie y "Cotton-eyed Joe" a tiempo para los días de rodeo de Tucson", comenta Cota.

Cota dice tener uno de los mejores empleos. Aunque no interactúa con los estudiantes todos los días como lo hacen los maestros, ella siempre hace tiempo para visitar los salones y estar al pendiente de los niños quienes corren hacia ella para contarle historias y abrazarla.

"Cuando estoy teniendo un mal día, no me quedo en mi oficina, voy a los salones porque los estudiantes siempre corren a abrazarme y contarme todas sus historias", dice Cota.

A Cota siempre le gusta ayudar en todo lo posible; hasta en poner sillas, limpiar mesas y mover muebles para las asambleas o eventos escolares.

"Son las cosas pequeñas las que demuestran el compromiso que se tiene a un lugar y al trabajo", afirma Cota.

Este año una vez más, Mission View estuvo en la lista de escuelas por cerrar de TUSD (el Distrito Escolar Unificado de Tucson). La mesa directiva de educación de Tucson cerró 11 escuelas del distrito y Mission View iba ser una de ellas. Hay incertidumbre para el próximo año pero Cota confía que con el apoyo de la comunidad y con eventos tales como la Feria de Hábitos Saludables (Healthy Habits Community Fair) del mes pasado, Mission View seguirá adelante. Cota se siente alentada y animada por la respuesta y asistencia de la comunidad, ya que esto le demuestra a los miembros de la mesa directiva la importancia de la escuela primaria Mission View.

"Es difícil no apegarse emocionalmente a la escuela. Tenemos un gran equipo aquí", explica Cota.

Cota también es el producto del sistema de TUSD cuando era más dinámico y tenía más presupuesto. Cota nació en Tucson, cerca de la Universidad de Arizona y asistió a la primaria Blenman, la secundaria Doolen y la preparatoria Catalina.

Cuando ella empezó a ir a la escuela, solo hablaba español. Sus padres eran originarios de Chihuahua, México, y su filosofía era "para encajar, necesitas aprender a hablar inglés, porque es un gran privilegio estar en este país", relata Cota.

Así que empezar a ir a la escuela significaba una inmersión total al inglés, "Era hundirse o nadar", ella explica.

Cuando Cota empezó a enseñar, ella fue capaz de utilizar esta experiencia a su favor. Cota ayudaba a los niños de familias migrantes a transferir el idioma inglés a los padres y ayudaba también con la traducción.

Ella no consideró solicitar el puesto de directora sino hasta la fecha límite. Cota no estaba muy segura de su decisión ya que había invertido más de un año de esfuerzo en Maxwell Middle School pero fue el ánimo de sus mentores del distrito la que la ayudó a seguir adelante en esta nueva etapa.

"Tú necesitas irte. Me encanta trabajar contigo, pero necesitas irte", le dijo la directora de Maxwell Middle School.

Yvette León fue la primera en entrevistar a Cota para el puesto. Se veía en la experiencia de Cota en escuelas anteriores que su nivel de compromiso y la pasión por sus alumnos y las familias eran genuinos. Lo cual era exactamente lo que Mission View y el Sur de Tucson buscaban en una directora.

Cuando Cota comienza a trabajar en una nueva escuela, ella mantiene en mente la frase, "si no está roto, no lo arregles". La directora Elizabeth Redondo, la antecesora de Cota en Mission View era muy apreciada y querida. Ella impartía respeto a los padres y los

Los niños de kínder se juntan alrededor de la planta y toman sus turnos ayudando a cubrir las raízes con tierra en Abril.

maestros y ayudó a establecer lo que era la escuela.

A pesar de esto, no tomó mucho tiempo para que Cota se sintiera bienvenida por la gente.

"Los padres y los empleados la aceptaron rápidamente, y ella inmediatamente empezó a desempeñar papeles importantes en la escuela", afirma Sharon Hering, su asesora educativa durante los últimos dos años.

Ella ha ayudado a crear un lugar seguro para la comunidad en Mission View, especialmente para los padres.

Muchos de los padres de familia del Sur de Tucson perdieron sus trabajos cuando golpeó la recesión en el 2008. Comúnmente, se ha visto a la gente relajándose en su patio o en sus porches durante el día. Pero padres como Connie García han preferido dar su tiempo libre a Mission View.

Ubicado en la parte trasera cerca de la cafetería se encuentra el "salón para padres." Todos los días llegan padres de familia con sus desayunos y almuerzos a este lugar después de dejar a sus hijos en clase para ayudar con las manualidades y los proyectos necesarios para ese día.

Los padres como García, comprenden el valor de ser activo en la escuela de su hijo. Esto mantiene a los estudiantes concentrados, involucrados y con ganas de aprender.

Mission View tiene un índice de deserción escolar muy alto, lo que significa que los estudiantes están constantemente abandonando la escuela.

"Tenemos una puerta giratoria, recibimos y perdemos estudiantes semanalmente, pero por lo general todos regresan dentro de unos meses o un año", expresa Cota.

Cota sigue desempeñando un papel dinámico en la comunidad del Sur de Tucson. Aunque Cota es líder de muchos proyectos del Sur de Tucson, ella elogia a su grupo de apoyo. Cada vez que la alaban por sus esfuerzos, tales como la reunión del equipo de trabajo de Hábitos Saludables del Sur de Tucson, ella simplemente sonríe con humildad y dice, "fue un esfuerzo de equipo".

Pero fue su iniciativa la que ayudó a construir un nuevo patio de juegos el pasado enero con un subsidio que recibió la cuidad. Cota juntó a un equipo que completó el proyecto con rapidez y también organizó la ceremonia de inauguración con la participación de todo el Sur de Tucson. Y hoy en los días soleados se pueden ver a las familias disfrutando de este gran patio.

Se le conoce a Cota por asistir a todas las reuniones y eventos de la comunidad del Sur de Tucson, y siempre está dispuesta a tener reuniones en su escuela. Aunque Cota dedica su tiempo, esfuerzo y energía a Mission View, también tiene energía para dar a la comunidad del Sur de Tucson y así mismo para mejorar en su educación.

"¿Tiempo libre? ¿Qué es eso?", ella pregunta.

La escuela es el centro de una comunidad, un hogar y un oasis.

Durante años, Mission View ha sido todo esto para la gente del Sur de Tucson, y Cota forma parte de ello.

"He sido parte de muchas comunidades de TUSD, y esta es la primera vez que me siento 'así'".

BY MEAGHAN FEE AND EL INDE STAFF

Dining in SoTu

Rich in authentic cuisine and family-friendly dining experiences, South Tucson's streets are filled with Mexican restaurants, new and old. Customers from near and far arrive for fresh homemade enchiladas, burros, and maybe a margarita or two. But with hundreds of Mexican restaurants located throughout the entire city of Tucson, what is it that makes the South Side restaurants unique?

Steve Mores, 64, said people come for Mexican food because "no where else is as good as it is on the South Side, the food is so much cheaper here" and "because these places have been here forever." Mores lives on the east side of Tucson but comes to South Tucson almost weekly.

Sara Yon, who works at Sue's Fish and Chips, on 35th Street and South Fourth Avenue, said that people from outside South Tucson stumble upon these restaurants unintentionally, when they search the web for nearby Mexican places to eat. "I've heard people say when they Google places to eat, they find Rigo's, Mi Nidito, Guillermo's. They all come up online, because they're all so good," Yon said. "And Rigo's gets so packed on the weekends you can't even find parking."

Rigo's, one of the newer Mexican restaurants in the area, is owned by Maria Lopez and her husband Rigoberto. Maria's sister and Rigoberto's two brothers also help run the restaurant. "Our buffet makes us different. Everyone loves the buffet, because no other restaurant here has it," Lopez said.

The historic Micha's on South Fourth Avenue has been owned and operated by the Mariscal family since 1976. "We've been consistent and have had the same cooks and servers for 28 years," said owner Richard Mariscal. "We have the same recipes my Mom taught me and when she passed away I passed them along."

Mi Nidito, located on the corner of Fourth Avenue and 29th Street, has been family owned and operated since 1952. The owners, Ernesto Lopez Jr. and his wife, Yolanda, pride themselves on authentic Sonoran cooking and quality service. Numerous celebrities have visited Mi Nidito over the years, including Enrique Iglesias and Bill Clinton.

Lily Wool, 21, a UA senior, recently dined at Mi Nidito with her sister Sonya, 24. "I've lived in the foothills since I was born and had never really been to South Tucson until my sister moved there with her boyfriend last month. It was really good, so authentic, and the staff was amazing," Wool said.

Guillermo's Double L opened in 1948 and stayed in the family until 2008 when current owner, Tony Gonzalez, took it over. Guillermo's oldest employee and current manager, Linda Baker, has been working there for 44 years. She said "good service, great food, dedicated workers," and the topopo salad, which she called "everyone's favorite dish," set their restaurant apart. "The south side has been known for Mexican food since way back when, and people come here from all over. Old Town, Green Valley, Sierra Vista, Willcox, Sahuarita," Baker said. Restaurant owners said people come to South Tucson for Mexican food because they know the food is authentic. "All the other restaurants are American," said Lopez. "This is real Mexican."

The signature Chiles Crossroads entrée features shrimp stuffed in a chili pepper and wrapped with bacon.

BIRRIERIA GUADALAJARA

sits directly across from the southwest side of Santa Rita park in South Tucson.The Gonzalez family has served their homemade Mexican recipes at that same location since the restaurant's grand opening over 30 years ago. "My mother used to cook for our family and friends, and everyone told her the food was really good, so she opened the restaurant when we came here," said the owner, Carmen Sánchez.

Sánchez's mother, Monica González, moved her family from Guadalajara to South Tucson in January 1981 and opened the restaurant that September. González still works at the restaurant full-time, along with five other family members.

Their red chili burritos and huevos rancheros are two popular items on the menu, but Sánchez said the birria soup, made from chiles, spices and meats, is her personal favorite.

Loyal customers drive from all over Tucson."We have many people who get off a plane and come to eat here before going anywhere else," Sanchez said. The restaurant is the oldest Mexican restaurant in South Tucson to remain at the same location owned by the same family.

– Meaghan Fee

CHANG'S CHINESE FAST FOOD

is a brightly decorated dining experience with the tastes of Chinese cuisine, a fusion of Spanish-speaking customers and savory scents. The orange chicken was delicious, sweet

and zesty. The tender pieces tasted candied, with just the right amount of sauce, a reminder of what comfort food really means.

Joline Truong runs Chang's with her husband. She spoke of three goals. "We try to be fast. Great tasting food," Truong said. "Excellent customer service."

– Megan Hurley

CROSSROADS RESTAURANT

is one of the spots to check out for a good bite to eat, at the corner of South Fourth Avenue and 36th Street. The live Mexican music on a Sunday afternoon gives the place an authentic feel. There are $4.99 drink specials every day for drinks like Piña Coladas and Rum Paradise.

The menu includes not only Mexican food like tacos and chimichangas, but also sandwiches and cheeseburgers. There is also a buffet bar for $9.99 which includes a drink. There are signature dishes like the Chiles Crossroads, which features a green chili pepper stuffed with shrimp, wrapped in bacon with melted cheese.

For traditional Mexican food, the carne asada chimichanga shouldn't be missed. Topped with melted cheese and served with extra cheese and lettuce, the grilled and diced steak meat in the chimi is cooked to perfection and gives you a taste of Mexico.

– Kimberly Ashley

CAFÉ DESTA

nestled north on the corner of Stone Avenue and 18th Avenue, offers authentic Ethiopian cuisine, an alternative to the abundance of Mexican fare in South Tucson.

The urban interior features brick walls and high ceilings, with two rooms separated by a large sliding metal barn door.

A great chalkboard hangs on the back wall near the cashier station identifying different teas or coffees patrons can choose from. The menu is simple, yet still provides an option for everyone, even vegans.

The lunch special gives customers the option to order three items on the menu. Each dish is served with a choice of rice or injera, which is a crepe or pancake-like sourdough bread made with teff, sorghum, and wheat flour.

Rather than using utensils to eat, customers at Café Desta use bread to pick up the food on their plates. While dining, I opted for three vegan dishes: misr, kik, and shiro.

Misr is made with red lentils, onions, and hot spices. It has a kick but it is not overpowering. Kik consists of yellow split peas, onions, turmeric and other herbs. Shiro is made with chickpeas or broad bean, onions, garlic, and spices.

Each mouthful was delightfully filling and healthy. The flavors are unique, robust and surprisingly delicious, despite the unique appearance of the food.

If you're looking to try something a little different, you won't go wrong stopping by Café Desta. The restaurant is open seven days a week from 11 a.m. until 9 p.m.

– Mariah Davidson

DON PEDRO'S

was founded by a Peruvian student studying engineering at the University of Arizona, who found himself longing for the tastes of home. Rather than having Mom send a care package he took matters into his own hands. In 2004, Peter Gonzvar opened a restaurant and named it after himself -- Don Pedro's in Rocky Point, Mexico. In 2010, he moved the restaurant to South Tucson. "We decided to create something where we can eat what we like," Gonzvar said. "Something more like home tastes."

Susan Ramírez, a waitress from Peru, said that the food is made with love and the staff worries about the costumers enjoying it.

"We want to teach the people about Peru," Ramirez said. "It's not just about the food. It's about the culture."

Mike Accetta was having lunch there recently. "I came here because I was looking for something different," Accetta said. Accetta started off with aguadito, a chicken soup, served with rolls. Lunch specials are from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays and include this small dish and a main meal for $9.99.

One of the waiters, Julio Espinoza, suggested that anyone wanting a conventional Peruvian drink should order Chichi Morada, a sweet drink made from imported purple corn from Peru, as well as apple, pineapple, cinnamon and potatoes.

Gonzvar said that around 70 percent of the ingredients are imported from Peru. The most traditional and popular item on the menu is the $11.99 Lomo Saltado. This dish consists of sautéed beef, onions, tomatoes, french fries, green onions and

Le Cave's Bakery is famous for their donuts. Ranging in flavors from mango-filled to glazed, they are also vegan.

Lomo saltado, the most traditional item on the menu at Don Pedro's Peruvian Bistro, at 3386 S. 6th Ave.

a side of rice. "We basically try to create recipes that are very authentic, they're fresh and health conscious," Gonzvar said.

The restaurant partners with clubs on campus to do percentage nights to give back and draw students in. "At night usually a lot of people come who actually lived in Peru for a long time," Gonzvar said. "They actually worked on the mines in Peru and they're very familiar with the food."

However, the menu may not be all the natives remember it to be. The choices also feature items with influences of Asian and Italian cuisine. Gonzvar said they are making new and innovative recipes. "Peruvian food is a mix of everything," Gonzvar said. "It looks the same as some things you may have seen, but it tastes totally different." *– Gabrielle Richman*

EL MINUTO CAFÉ

is conveniently located on the outskirt of downtown Tucson and serves authentic Mexican cuisine daily. It has been open since 1939, making the restaurant a local favorite for people of all ages. Although the lunch hour is bustling with business people, families and young couples, every guest is welcomed warmly and seated promptly.

The entrance to the restaurant showcases the outdoor seating as if it were a secret garden. Once through the front door, the pride of El Minuto Café, photos of famous patrons and visitors hang above the front counter. The light pink walls are lined with eclectic decorations that all seem to compliment one another. The only consistency is the traditional blanket-like blinds that hang above each window.

Homemade salsa and fresh tortilla chips are served to every table. Be careful not to fill up on chips before ordering; they are a dangerously delicious duo. While browsing the extensive menu, pay attention to dishes made with carne seca. The dried beef is an in-house specialty and is highly recommended. Try not to gawk at the presentation of your plate. Twice the size of a human head, each combination plate comes with a hearty portion of rice and beans. The wait staff is more than happy to bring a to-go box and is not at all surprised by the request.

Whether a first time diner or a returning customer, you will leave feeling like a regular.

– Megan Alletson

LE CAVE'S BAKERY

Peeling paint, faded signs and bullet holes give the bakery a look of vacancy and abandonment. But take a big whiff, and you are renewed with hope that inside, there are fresh pastries being baked.

Since 1935, Le Cave's has been bringing old-fashioned donuts to people all over, and not just Tucson. Visitors of the Old Pueblo are prodded by their hotel connoisseur to visit this iconic bakery, that some say have nothing on Krispy Kreme or Dunkin' Donuts.

We took this statement to the test.

On first inspection of the classic glazed donut, you may wonder, what it is missing. The hole. It is believed that back when Le Cave's was in the peak of it popularity, it sold its recipe, hole and all to another bakery. Since then, they are forbidden to bake donuts with holes or suffer the consequences of the law.

Biting down into the hole-less pastry releases a plush sense of sugary joy. Light inside, a dense belly of the cake on the bottom and a perfect amount of sweet glaze makes you want another, chocolate or maple one – now.

With a friendly and helpful staff, Le Cave's Bakery has kept customers coming from all across Tucson. This South Tucson bakery serves more than just their delicious and fresh famous donuts.

It's a full service bakery serving some 400 to 500 specialty cakes each week. It also specializes in Tres Leches, flan, fruit filled empanadas and other delectable pastries. Best of all, each day they bag up the unsold pastries to give to charity.

Though the exterior may seem like the place is about to close anytime, the beautiful cakes, variety of classic donuts and more treats inside are poised and perfectly presented.

– Cecelia Marshall

LOS PORTALES

means "entryways," so it seems only natural that customers must walk through giant wooden doors to find their way into the authentic Cocina Mexicana.

The family-owned and -operated restaurant opened in 2007 and has been serving up Mexican food ever since. The décor consists of brightly colored walls, cowboy-boot adornments along the ceiling, and wooden tables. Little iron mariachi

The teriyaki chicken, orange chicken and white rice at Chang's Chinese Fast Food.

statues greet you outside before you walk through the doors.

During the lunch rush, Los Portales offers a buffet with traditional options. Other favorites on the menu include the fajitas, camarones and combination plates; especially the taco, tamale and enchilada. Fresh tortillas can be purchased by the dozen for $3 to take home after your meal. During lunch, the atmosphere is casual and unhurried.

– Gabrielle Richman

MILAGROS TORTILLAS

is a family-owned tortilla factory in South Tucson, which opened in September 2012. The Frisby family moved to South Tucson years ago, and opened a restaurant called La Buena Tortillería, on East 22nd Street. La Buena Tortilleria closed in 2010 and re-opened on South Fourth Avenue, as a tortilla factory called Milagros Tortillas.

"Our tortillas were doing better than our restaurant, we also had a lot of building issues. My family decided to close down the restaurant and re-open in a new location as a tortilla factory," said Luis Frisby, whose sister owns the factory.

The tortillas were so popular, the family decided to sell them to various businesses and clients all over Tucson.

Milagros tortillas are purchased by businesses throughout the city, including barbeque, Mexican and American restaurants. Some of these restaurants are Rigo's, Micha's, Minditos, Pancho Villa, the B Line and Old Pueblo Grill. Milagros also sells masa, nixtamal and tamales. All of their food is made at the factory. The tortillas range from packages of a dozen to 24 count, and from 4 to 18 inches. *– Ashley Olden*

TUCSON WHOLESALE LLC.

One step into South Tucson's new candy store warehouse, your teeth begin to ache and your eyes glaze over at the towering shelves piled with brightly colored Mexican candy. Tucson Wholesale opened its doors last November as the first and only shop of its kind in Tucson, people from all around Southern Arizona make a trip to stock up on these fresh goodies.

Sweets are never in short supply. From ice cream, gum, lollipops and even chips and piñatas, Tucson Wholesale caters to the predominantly Hispanic culture of South Tucson and neighborhood community when it comes time for birthday parties and quinceañeras. *– Cecelia Marshall*

Where to Go in SoTu

Birrieria Guadalajara
(520) 624-8020
304 E. 22nd St.
Cuisine: *Mexican*

Café Desta
(520) 370-7000
758 S. Stone Avenue
Cuisine: *Ethiopian*

Chang's Chinese Fast Food
(520) 624-3935
347 E. 36th Street
Cuisine: *Chinese*

Crossroads Restaurant
(520) 624-0395
2602 S. Fourth Ave.
Cuisine: *Mexican*

Don Pedro
(520) 209-1740
3386 S. Sixth Avenue
Cuisine: *Peruvian*

El Minuto Café
(520) 882-4145
354 S. Main Avenue
Cuisine: *Mexican*

Guillermo's Double L
(520) 792-1585
1830 S. Fourth Ave.
Cuisine: *Mexican*

Le Cave's
(520) 624-2561
1219 S. 6th Avenue
Cuisine: *Bakery*

Los Portales Restaurant
(520) 889-1170
2615 S. Sixth Ave.
Cuisine: *Mexican*

Micha's Restaurant
(520) 623-5307
2908 S. Fourth Ave.
Cuisine: *Mexican*

Mi Nidito
(520) 622-5081
1813 S. Fourth Ave.
Cuisine: *Mexican*

Milagros Tortillas
(520) 624-1796
1700 S. Fourth Ave.
Cuisine: *Mexican*

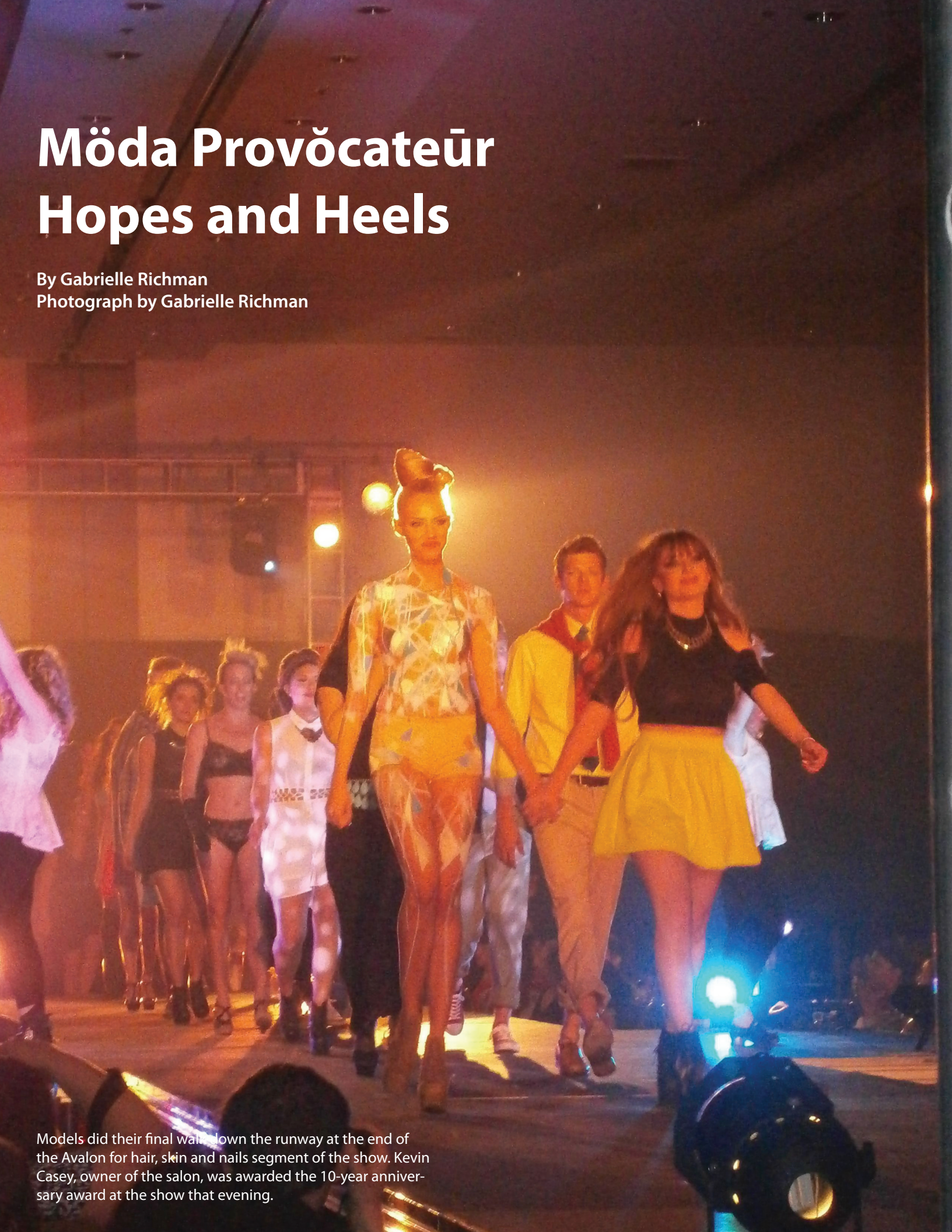
Rigo's
(520) 882-9323
2527 S. Fourth Ave.
Cuisine: *Mexican*

Sue's Fish and Chips
(520) 622-5711
2500 S. Fourth Ave.
Cuisine: *Seafood*

Tucson Wholesale LLC
(520) 623-3818
2140 S. Fourth Ave.
Cuisine: *Sweets*

Möda Provŏcateūr Hopes and Heels

By Gabrielle Richman
Photograph by Gabrielle Richman



Models did their final walk down the runway at the end of the Avalon for hair, skin and nails segment of the show. Kevin Casey, owner of the salon, was awarded the 10-year anniversary award at the show that evening.

"The models are not just a tall, lanky, 100-pound nothing. ... They are all shapes and sizes."

At the 10th annual Möda Provŏcateūr" fashion show of the Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation boutiques and designers showed a huge range of styles -- preppy sweaters, classic dresses and even body paint as outfits.

Newcomer to the show Ulta, like many other salons, picked a clear theme that was darker and intense, filled with some zombie-like face make-up.

"The show was an incredible mix of fashion and compassion," Yekatherina Bruner, stylist and founder of Tucson Fashion Group, said.

KOLD's chief meteorologist Chuck George emceed the event, sponsored by the Udall Law Firm and Arizona Lottery, at the Tucson Convention Center. More dance performances and new lighting were added this year to spice up the show.

Dancers in tight black outfits from BreakOut Studios exploded onto stage at the opening, moving to bright spotlights and entertaining music. The crowd roared at the group's fierce attitude. Two Irish clog dancers followed, surprising the audience with their in-sync moves and spirit.

"It doesn't matter where you live in Tucson, it doesn't matter what your fashion taste is, it doesn't matter if you don't even have a fashion taste," said Monique Vallery, associate director of development for the foundation. "Visually it's just a very cool show."

R.J. Wilkinson, the volunteer coordinator, said the foundation hoped to raise $70,000 on Sunday at the Tucson Convention Center, $10,000 more than last year, but their final total came to $65,000. This year's theme was "We Take Care of Our Own." The organization paid tribute to those people who volunteer their time to take care of those living with HIV/AIDS.

The organization gave the 10-year anniversary award to Kevin Casey, the Möda originator and this year's chair. Tucson Lifestyle Magazine got the annual Cele Peterson Award, named after the famed boutique owner known as the "First Lady of Fashion."

The foundation promoted the event through its Facebook, website, a campaign through AdVision and a 'Harlem Shake' video.

"Hundreds of people came together to make a difference," Bruner said.

Wilkinson said most of the people involved in producing the show were volunteers.

"One of the big things that I emphasize is that anyone and everyone has something to contribute, from the youngest child to the oldest person out there," Wilkinson said.

The salons, models, tech crew, stylist and dance performers involved in the event were all also there to donate time and expertise. Vallery estimated that there would be close to 4,000 volunteer hours for the show.

Alpha Epsilon Delta, a pre-health honorary at UA, sent volunteers including Melanie Russell, who helped with check-in and stayed through the show to assist .

"I got to volunteer backstage and I'm the only person back there so it's awesome," Russell said.

This year there were five different salon and fashion segments, three different dance segments and "Project Möda," where three local designers created garments that competed in four categories for the audience to judge.

The three brought completely different point of views to the show. All of the pieces sparkled in their unique way as the models stood on the stage together. Some stand out designs included a dress made entirely of playing cards and one that looked to be hand pleated magazine pages. The "best in show" winner of this year's "Project Möda" was Sarah Mitchell.

"Part of the message we were supposed to convey is how important it is to get yourself checked out and know what is going on inside of your body," Mitchell said.

Her designs were based on the theme of self-discovery and self-awareness. She featured a piece made of mirrors, based on females going through the phase in their life where they obsess on their outer appearance. Her second look was a butterfly inspired outfit, representing metamorphosis. The final look was a body suit that showed the internal parts of the female body.

Models rehearsed for a week. "We practiced our portion of the show three times," said Tami Smith, one of the models. "We got to watch some of the other salons and designers rehearse as well."

"Möda is such a great production to be apart of because everybody has such a positive attitude," she continued. "Everybody shares the passion of modeling, photography, art, etc. and we all are so excited to support Southern Arizona AIDS Foundation and raise money for this great cause."

Smith began modeling during her senior year of high school, but the modeling calls are open to anyone who wants a chance to walk the runway.

"The models are not just a tall, lanky, 100-pound nothing," Vallery said. "They are all shapes and sizes."

"There was a lot of practice in the making to make this happen but when it comes down to it, it was unbelievable," said Andre Gannon, who modeled Vertical Dollz.

When each of the segments began, the mood in the room was contagious and the models were full of energy.

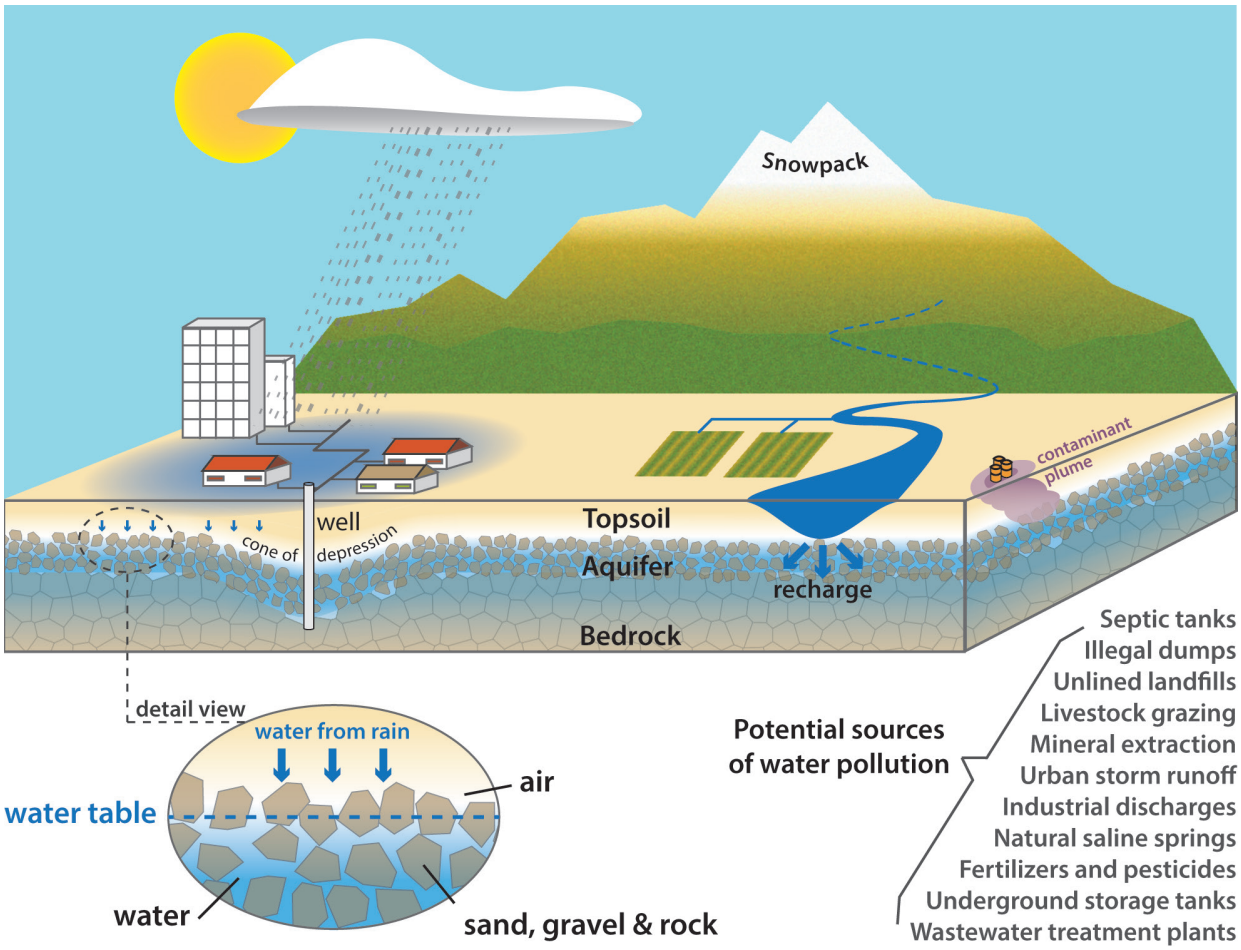
"When you actually physically hit the actual runway, you get this surge of energy and you just work it," Gannon continued. "I could not be more proud of my girls and myself and everything we put together."

Projection: WGS 1984; Data: USGS; Map: Kedi Xia.

WATER

a flowing history of Arizona

BY KEDI XIA



Water shapes history. Human settlement of the Southwest is the story of finding and using water. Before the arrival of Europeans, various tribal people occupied what is now Arizona. The Hohokam settled in the fertile Salt River valley and built canals to carry Salt River water for farming. The Hopis grew corn, squash and beans in flood plains and spring-fed terraced gardens.

In the early eighteenth century, Spanish settlers brought their water laws and traditions to southern Arizona. The Salt River provided a fickle water source, sometime dry, then flooding. To control the Salt River, Roosevelt Dam was completed in 1911 by the newly created Reclamation Service (later the Bureau of Reclamation) as part of a program of water development projects to settle the West. The dam also marks the beginnings of the Salt River Project (SRP). Now operating of four reservoirs and several power generating stations, SRP provides electricity, flood protection and recreation.

The introduction of turbine pumps enabled groundwater to be extracted from greater depths and greatly expanded its use since World War II. From 1945 to 2007, irrigated acreage grew from 768,000 acres to 2.69 million acres, mostly using groundwater. Meanwhile Arizona's population mushroomed, from 594,000 in 1945 to 6.39 million in 2010, further increasing water demand.

THE ILLUSTRATION

Check out more of Kedi Xia's work at elindenews.com.

SOURCES: **USDA, Census Bureau.**

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