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Students explore Latin America

By Jeff Hamilton
 Emerald Contributor

The play may have been about endangered sea turtles, but the group that traveled throughout Central and South America educating audiences just wanted to celebrate the sanctity of life.

Cristian Torlasco, an architecture student at the University, and Marcela Nagel, also of Eugene, are two of the six members of Tortuga Libre, which in Spanish means "free the turtle".

Nagel said the group traveled by van to eight countries in rural areas and performed its play for children. Nagel said though the play was about endangered sea turtles, the group tried to focus on the positive.

"The biggest message of the play we performed throughout our travels is to celebrate life," Nagel said. "The sea turtle is a symbol of everything in this world and what can happen to it."

Torlasco, who plays the villain of the story, said the play is based on a Native American legend about how the constellations formed.

"The idea of the play," Torlasco said, "is that sea turtles were sent to Earth by the sun and the moon in order to protect the light of the stars. Each time a turtle disappeared there would be a shooting star in remembrance of the turtle. At the end, the sun and the moon form the constellations as a reminder that we are sharing the Earth, and we have to guard it."

Nagel said the majority of the audiences had never seen a play before and they enjoyed it a great deal.

"We received new experiences each day," Torlasco said. "There was an exchange. We were able to give them our music and drama, and they shared themselves. The people were really open and friendly and had a strong indigenous culture that they shared with us."

Nagel said they learned a lot about the culture in the different countries.

"People think that Latin American countries are all the same," she said, "but each country we visited was totally different from the others and each had its own different culture. It was great to be able to play music with and share cultures

with all the different people."

According to the Sea Turtle Restoration Project, the sea turtle is endangered because of a number of human actions. Of the seven sea turtle species, six are endangered.

"Tens of thousands of sea turtles drown in the nets of shrimp boats each year," said Todd Steiner, the head of the project. "The skin is also made into leather and used for such things as boots and leather jackets."

Steiner said many international laws have been created to protect the sea turtle against these occurrences.

Tortuga Libre made a documentary about the sea turtle that was aired in the San Francisco Bay Area many times during one month.

The members of Tortuga Libre met in Santa Cruz, Calif., last March. For the next three months they prepared for the trip and performed their music, a mixture of salsa, Latin and modern styles, around the Bay Area in order to earn money to fund the trip.

Once the group reached Panama it had to fly to Colombia because the Pan American highway dead ends into 70 miles of jungle.

Torlasco said the flight from Panama to Colombia was the most expensive part of the trip. The group even had to put their van in the plane.

To save money, the group performed their music in exchange for free lodging in many areas.

Nagel said the group experienced several memorable adventures during its journey.

One time in Colombia, Torlasco and Nagel were chased several blocks back to their hotel by six screaming men.

"We still don't know why they were chasing us," Torlasco said.

"A memorable experience for me," Nagel said, "was rafting in an inner tube in the rapids of Costa Rica with the jungle on both sides of me and seeing monkeys on trees and iguanas jumping in the river."

"The message I would like to leave with others is that anybody who would like to do something similar can," Torlasco said. "It isn't dangerous if you have a little common sense, and it is very inexpensive. We plan to do this again someday."

ASUO lobbies for Oregon tax reform

By Tammy Batey
 Emerald Associate Editor

The ASUO on Monday kicked off its "Fighting for the Future of Oregon" campaign, which will emphasize the need for tax reform to counteract the effects of 1990's Ballot Measure 5 on higher education.

The campaign will include a lobby day in Salem on March 3 as well as letter writing and phone drives to legislators. ASUO Vice President Karmen Fore said people need to educate legislators about the impact the higher education crunch is having on college students.

"Who better to do that than students," Fore said.

Enrollment dropped by about

1,200 people from fall term 1990 to fall term 1991 — from 18,141 to 16,905, said Tom North, the assistant registrar. Tuition during that same period jumped from \$655 to \$866 a term for full-time resident undergraduates.

Fore said she fears enrollment may drop by about 2,400 in the second round of cutbacks caused by Measure 5.

Students must face rising tuition costs at a time when college degrees are becoming more valuable, said Ryan Deckert, ASUO state affairs coordinator.

"The message is quite simple," Deckert said. "We are University students fighting for the future of Oregon. If we don't have educated citizens,

the impact on the economy is unquestioned."

The letter and phone drives will enable students who can't make the trip to Salem on March 3 to voice their views to legislators, said John Thomas, Student Senate president.

The "Fighting for the Future of Oregon" campaign is modeled after the campaign she and ASUO President Bobby Lee ran in spring 1992 for their present ASUO positions, Fore said.

ASUO members will encourage students to write letters to legislators, Fore said.

"Unlike elections where people could re-elect legislators who were responsive to higher education, students don't know the steps they can take to influence legislators," she said.

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