

MEChA conference to deal with dropouts

In a MEChA-sponsored conference, students, professors and guest speakers will lead workshops to help

Roman Gokhman
Campus/City Culture Reporter

The University chapter of MEChA, the group dedicated to raising awareness of Chicano and Latino culture, will bring the Second Annual Mictlampa Chuatlampa (Northwest) Regional Conference to the University Feb. 7 through 9.

The focuses of the conference include the importance of community, history, leadership and education, military recruitment of Latinos and homophobia and transgender issues in the Latino community.

"This is what we are going through

right now," MEChA member Isaac Torres explained.

Torres said Latinos in Oregon have high dropout rates and high pregnancy rates — issues that need to be dealt with.

"We have to educate (Latinos) on how to get into college," he said, adding that many Latino college students are the first in their family.

Best-selling author Victor Villaseñor will present the keynote address at the conference Saturday evening, and will sign books afterward.

Students and professors will lead workshops, Que Locos, a Latino comedy showcase, will perform Saturday night and nationally syndicated editorial cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz will make a presentation Sunday.

University ethnic studies Profes-

sor Matt Garcia will talk about the relationships between people of color and the U.S. military.

"Communities of color have been heavily recruited by the military to serve at ... entry-level positions," Garcia said. "The military is one of the few means by which upward mobility is achieved for people of color, in general, and Latinos in specific."

Lane Community College ethnic studies Professor Michael Samano, who served in the military and will also lead a workshop, agreed.

"We tend to over-represent ourselves in the lower ranks," he said.

About 500 University and high school students from the Northwest are expected to attend.

High school students will attend the first day and parts of the second day, and will spend the night in Ger-

linger Hall. They will also participate in roundtable discussions about what new ideas they take back from the conference. Villaseñor will speak Saturday at 5 p.m. in Agate Hall.

The third day of the conference is free to students and the public, but the first two days have an admission fee. The cost for students is \$13 for both days and \$8 for one day. Admission for community members is \$20 for both days and \$15 for one. The price includes lunch and a dance Friday, and lunch and dinner on Saturday.

The conference will cost MEChA

about \$26,000. The group was forced to take funds from other MEChA accounts, such as Chicano Explosion and the Cinco de Mayo Celebration.

Other MEChA chapters in Oregon participating in the event include Oregon State University, Willamette University, Western Oregon University, Mt. Hood Community College, Chemeketa Community College and Portland State University.

PSU hosted the inaugural event in 2002.

Contact the reporter at romangokhman@dailymerald.com.

Hardships

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of discrimination, cultural and language barriers and a learning disability later identified as dyslexia, he dropped out of high school and moved to Mexico, where he discovered Mexican art, literature and music never taught to him in his native California.

Mexico helped Villaseñor understand his past, but when he returned to the United States in 1960, he still wanted to destroy the teachers and books who taught him to hate himself and his heritage.

"Finally, I decided that instead of killing people, it would be better to write books and kill the one-sided, ignorant ideas that were poisoning us all inside our brains," he said.

Villaseñor said the hate drove him to continue turning in manuscripts through 265 rejections before publication in 1973 of his first book, "Macho," which the Los Angeles Times compared to the best of Steinbeck.

This eventually led to his best-selling book "Rain of Gold," which was published in 1991 and is the precursor to his latest work, "Thirteen Senses."

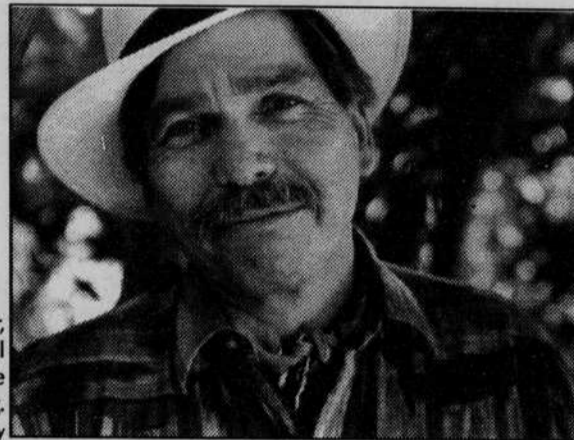
Villaseñor, also a public speaker, said he starts his talks by asking the audience how many people speak English, Spanish or a third language.

"Any county that speaks English-only is bankrupt and going nowhere," he said, adding that diversity is "important for a community of health and vitality."

The author said he has high hopes for America and the rest of the world.

"This country of the United States can become a great nation by taking out the dots," he said.

Victor Villaseñor, an author will speak at the MEChA meeting. Courtesy



"Our strength is like prairie grass. Prairie grass can survive a 5,000-year ice age; a 5,000-year drought. Why? Because some of the short grass has a root system that goes 22 feet into mother Earth."

"Thirteen Senses," published in 2001, includes the author's answer to bringing people together.

"What happens is, I help them break out of the box and ... open the possibility for them to become geniuses," he said.

Villaseñor calls the senses of sight, hearing, smell and taste the "brain computer" — the senses one uses to think. The "heart computer" is composed of the sense of feeling, along with balance and intuition. He said balance allows people to be two things at once: "Conservative and liberal; pro-life and for abortion in certain cases. 'And,' not 'or.'"

"Balance takes polarity out of the mind (and) dissolves opinion, and understanding starts surfacing," Villaseñor explained.

Villaseñor said the brain computer helps to think, and the heart computer helps to know.

The next two senses — music and "being psychic" — are part of the "soul computer."

"Uni-verse means unity-soul," he said, describing the importance of music. Being psychic is a result of using the first eight senses, according to Villaseñor. He said he does not like to give out the remaining four senses, because when someone can use the first nine, he will figure them out for himself.

"What I do with my writing is take (people) out of the brain computer and into the heart and soul computer," he said.

MEChA member Isaac Torres said Villaseñor's stories include mystery and spiritual depth.

"He speaks about things on a metaphysical level," Torres said.

MEChA's Internal Director Jesus Garcia said he respects Villaseñor as an important person in Chicano history.

"We're learning a big part of culture from him," he said.

Villaseñor said putting words on paper gives him a feeling of accomplishment.

"When I write ... I'm flying," he said. "Writing to me is just a beautiful, wonderful thing."

Contact the reporter at romangokhman@dailymerald.com.

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