

Latino Leadership gathers for adventure



Amelie Lambert hoists herself on a tire swing in Camp Cooper's outdoor challenge course.

JARED BEZZANT
Co-A&E Editor

"My legs were like Jell-O," said Vicky Aguilar after completing the high course. "I was scared."

Aguilar, along with 12 other students from the Latino Leadership class at Clackamas, spent Saturday on what could be called a scary adventure. They participated in an outdoor challenge course at Camp Cooper, which was located in the coastal mountains by Willamina.

Most of the students completed the high course which looked like a small-scale Ewok Village. High in the trees were raised platforms, and between the trees were wires, thin bridges and a narrow log. The students were clad in yellow helmets and body harnesses called "rabbit ears", to provide security in case of a fall. They were to walk and climb through each obstacle.

Carmen Meyer stood on a high platform and waited with fright in her eyes, trying to get the strength to cross the log, high above the forest ground. The encouragement of a scout leader helped her to take small steps across the slick log, until she arrived safely on the other side.

"I was afraid to do it," said Meyer, "but at that same time I was pushing myself."

That is the purpose behind the outdoor challenge course. Beyond just the physical obstacles, the course is set up to challenge students mentally—to give them confidence where it seems weak.

The high course ends with a hung pulley that slides downward from the tall tree to the ground below called a "zip line."

"That was the scariest part for me," said Clackamas mentor Alexander Lozano. Once the jump was made, though, all screamed with excitement from the rush of adrenaline.

The classroom was very different for these students on Saturday, and next time they go up, they will be the leaders.

The students in Latino Leadership are part of a program through Oregon Council for Hispanic Advancement (OCHA) and the Oregon Leadership Institute (OLI). The OCHA students are mentors that are assigned Latino high school students in the effort of being role models and helping them achieve goals, and most importantly, graduation.

"There is a 15.7 percent high school dropout rate for Latinos. For Anglos it is only 5.9 percent," said class advisor Ayde York. "In college it is even higher—that is why the program was started."

York explained that the students and teenagers support each other. The mentors are motivated to continue studies so students have someone to look up to. The teenagers in return

receive personal guidance and valuable information on how to plan for the future.

"Many of the young students come from migrant worker families and move a lot," said York. "Some don't even think they can go to college."

The high school students began participation earlier this year on activities designed to build leadership qualities, teamwork skills and communication ability. They have also received advice on making goals and information such as college registration and career ideas. On May 23, they will participate in the same outdoor challenge course that their mentors did on Saturday.

"We want the students to face problems they don't know how to handle," said York.

And that is how some of the OCHA mentors felt at the camp. They worked games that required strategy and non-verbal communication. They were blindfolded. They had to climb over a tall wall as a group, which required planning and teamwork. They had to help and encourage each other. Each activity taught a valuable lesson.

Clackamas mentor Jessica Velazquez stood with her back facing the edge of a high platform. She was to repeat her name and promise to keep her arms straight and back stiff as she fell backwards in hopes that the group below would catch her.

"Last time I did this I gave someone a black eye," said Velazquez. Her arms had lost control on the fall down. This time she fell with grace and was caught.

Velazquez knows what it is like because she was once an OCHA high school student, and has now graduated, moving on to Clackamas. Two of the other mentors, Sophia Perez and Shastina Solaita, are also living examples of the success of the OCHA program.

These are the people that York hopes continue to come through the program to be role models from the transition of high school student to college mentor.

"Now there is a negative cycle, we want to change that into a positive cycle," said York.

The Latino Leadership class is only in its second term at Clackamas, and is the newest of five sites in Oregon. There are hopes to expand to two more at Mt. Hood Community College and Portland Community College by next fall.

The class has become a valuable learning experience for the mentors who are doing hands-on experience with real people and situations outside the classroom. This class provides the opportunity to help other people.

"I felt very proud of myself to finish," said Meyer on completion of the outdoor challenge course. And that is how these mentors hope the OCHA students feel after graduation.



Irene Carrillo cheerfully crosses a rope bridge while navigating the course's formidable path.

JARED BEZZANT / Clackamas Print

Fellowship of Christian Athletes: a students' refuge

JOEL P. SHEMPERT
Feature Editor

"A refuge." "A fellowship." "An escape."

Not the average description of a Clackamas club, perhaps—but Fellowship of Christian Athletes is no ordinary club. Its members, when asked, all affirm that FCA is a special, peaceful place where they can take a break from life's restless pace. And as the group circled Clackamas' flagpole and prayed last Thursday, it was apparent that their focus is unique.

"[FCA is] kind of a refuge, basically—because school gets stressful, and a lot of times you can lose your focus," said FCA leader Tiffany Fine at Thursday's gathering. The club is a focal point of Fine's schedule. "It's a good place to go to just get renewed... I look forward to every week."

Other FCA leaders agree. Andy Purscelley stated, "I really

like the fellowship part about it," while David Lemen explained that "it's kind of like an accountability group." Jen Rogers added that club meetings are "like a time to get away and focus on the Lord."

So what sets FCA apart from other Christian clubs? Fine answered that "there's quite a few Christian groups on campus. One does Bible study [Baptist Student Ministries], one does evangelism [Campus Crusade for Christ], and FCA is the third part of the Christian faith: fellowship. . . There's no study involved; sometimes there's discussion, but that's a form of fellowship. It's just a coming together, just to be together, to support one another."

Fellowship is more than just a pretty word to these students. It's the core of their club's philosophy, and the reason most of them were drawn to the group.

I got involved in FCA in high school," related Purscelley, "and that's when I really started to believe in what FCA can do. The philosophy of it I agree with: working on interpersonal relationships with not only athletes, but everybody."

The word "everybody" is key, because it's a common misconception that the club is only for Christian sportsmen and women. Not so; FCA welcomes all into its ranks.

"We don't exclude anybody; everybody's welcome," Fine affirmed. "You don't have to be an athlete. You don't have to be a former athlete—just somebody who wants to fellowship." FCA strives to be a warm and friendly group, accepting both non-athletes and non-Christians.

FCA, its members testify, is of



JOEL P. SHEMPERT / Clackamas Print

Tiffany Fine leads Clackamas' Fellowship of Christian athletes in prayer around the flagpole outside the Community Center. The club has been easing students' burdens for nine years.

great value in their personal and academic lives. It helps students, claimed Lemen, to "let God's love shine through us and out into our community and our sports."

Fine added that the club offered therapeutic relief from the academic, workplace, and training pressure that athletes especially face, and Rogers intimated that "it also helps a lot with... concentrating on the right thing when I'm doing sports."

FCA has been going strong at Clackamas for nine years, and its continued success is evidence of its relevance to pressured students. But the strongest testimonial is from students themselves. Why join the Fellowship of Christian athletes? Simple—as Lemen said, "so we can stay together and keep bonding, and help each other out in our time of need."

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