

Latino Club becomes 'second family' for students

BY MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

The Latino Club at McNary High School meets in portable 58 on Thursday afternoons from 2:30-3:30 p.m.

But what started as a small after-school gathering has turned into so much more.

"We started off as a small group, but we grew so fast. We consider this to be a second family," McNary sophomore Jazmin Orta said.

The club was started by Ana Solorio Diaz and Loreli Estrada, who both work in special education at the school and both were part of McNary's initial Latino club — Solorio Diaz graduated in 2011 and Estrada graduated in 2006.

When the club first reformed in Fall of 2017, only six students showed up. Now, there are consistently more than 30 kids that come each and every week.

"It all came together naturally," Solorio Diaz said. "Kids started coming back week after week. That was my biggest motivation to keep this going."

While Thursday afternoons in portable 58 consists of games, food, laughter and fun conversation, this crew takes great pride in being involved in the Keizer community in a number of different ways.

"Our main goal is to bring them up as leaders so they learn how to serve their community and do nice things for our neighbors," said club advisor Mary Barfknecht.

Community service is a big point-of-emphasis for the Latino Club as they have contributed to a number of projects in Keizer throughout the school year — including cleaning mobile-home parks as well as doing yard work and helping put in a playground at Country Glen Park.

"I feel like it's my responsibility to help the community," McNary student Brian Hernandez said. "I'm really passionate about helping cleaning up the environment and making it a better place so that everyone can enjoy it."

However, what gained this group the most notoriety was what they organized at the Keizer Chamber of Commerce Award Banquet back in January.



TOP: Members of the McNary High School Latino Club performed at the Keizer Chamber of Commerce First Citizen Banquet in January. ABOVE: Most of the current members of the club.

Several members of the club organized and performed a series of traditional Latino dances, which got a rousing ovation from everyone in attendance.

"I just wanted to get myself out there. It was challenging, but it was awesome when people started clapping for us,"

McNary student Jesse Tapia said. "It got people excited."

Because of the popularity of their show, the Latino Club has scheduled a number

of upcoming performances in May, including at a school assembly and at Latino Parent Night.

"We want to show people that we still keep in touch with our roots," Orta said. "I love being able to do the dances that my parents and grandparents did."

Earlier this month, the crew, along with Barfknecht, has even started a Latino Dance Club at McNary, which meets Mondays at 2:30 p.m. in the aerobics room.

"Being able to show our culture to the rest of the school is really important to us," Orta said.

Estrada added: "We want kids not to be afraid of having a voice."

But the involvement doesn't stop there.

The Latino Club is planning on making on float for the Iris Festival — which will be Saturday, May 18 — and has multiple other cleanup projects on their calendar in the Keizer community.

"It's amazing to see them keep coming back to do selfless work," Solorio Diaz said. "Every volunteer sheet is filled no matter what event we do."

"You really feel the vibe when you're apart of this club."

Tapia added: "My favorite part of this club is serving in the community."

Keizer Pho hosts Night Off

After a long day, the thought of cooking dinner and cleaning up the kitchen can be daunting. The Keizer Chamber of Commerce is hoping to restore some peace of mind to home chefs.

A new initiative aims to support both home cooks and local restaurants. The chamber calls it Cook's Night Off. By participating, you could win a \$100 restaurant gift card.

Cook's Night Off this month will be held at Keizer Pho, 3400 River Road N., and is scheduled for Wednesday, March 20. Keizer cooks and their families are invited to dine at Keizer Pho and be entered to win a \$100 gift card.

You are encouraged to post a picture of your dinner at Keizer Pho tagging both the restaurant and the Keizer Chamber of Commerce on Facebook. Additionally, entries into the drawing can be made at the restaurant with an entry form. Cooks use both methods for double the chance to win.

For more information about Cook's Night Off or other Chamber programs, visit keizerchamber.com or call (503) 393-9111.

ATTN: Investment Property Owners

Right now is a crucial time to **take advantage of a 1031-Exchange** to optimize capital gains tax reduction, increase your base, and optimize your cash flow.



Kristine Jacobsen
Principal Broker / Owner



Call me at **503.504.7330** for a FREE market analysis of your investment property



The Perfect Setting for Your Wedding & Reception

- Four Acres of Landscaped Gardens • Ample Parking
- Private Dressing Rooms



LOG HOUSE GARDEN
AT WILLOW LAKE

5655 WINDSOR ISLAND ROAD N - KEIZER
503-393-0732 | WWW.LOGHOUSEGARDEN.COM

VISIT THE ALL NEW
KEIZERTIMES.COM

Take the new site for a spin by signing up for a **FREE 30-DAY TRIAL**. You'll get **UNLIMITED ACCESS** to all the news in Keizer — **More than ever before!**

SIGN UP NOW

