Clark Park Receives $25,000 In Generator Z Funds

Projected offerings include:
- lacrosse, curling, sand volleyball,
- juggling, bike polo, bike repair, badminton, rowing, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

The program also includes field trips to see professional baseball, hockey, soccer, and basketball games in Detroit.

A number of Zoom meetings and phone conversations conducted with youth to obtain their input led to this innovative idea.

“We’re really excited to see how it all works out,” said Center Director Anthony Benavides. “This is their creation, and we are happy to bring it to life.” Benavides said.

Youth would like to have sports psychology and mental fitness sessions, as well. Benavides feels this is partly a result of the pandemic stresses in general and the lack of ability to play sports during the pandemic. Benavides said they are currently putting together a series of activities for Try Something! The program should be in full swing for fall and winter.

PENSAMIENTOS Y RECUERDOS

Experiences in the Center for Chicano-Boricua Studies

5th in a series on the 50th Anniversary of the Center for Latino and Latin American Studies (Wayne State University)

Jose Cuello was the Director of Chicano-Boricua Studies from 1989 to 2001. He will be retiring this August from Wayne State University. Under his leadership the program enjoyed increased stability and more often a well needed break from the constant tension the Center had been experiencing with the university for a significant number of years.

I recently had the opportunity to sit down with Jose at a southwest Detroit Mexican restaurant and it truly was a wide-ranging conversation. I must acknowledge from the outset that I cannot do justice in this relatively short article to the full extent of our conversation so I will focus on some of the key highlights as it relates to his experiences and perspectives related to Chicano Boricua Studies, now called the Center for Latino and Latin American Studies at Wayne State University.

First a little bit about Jose. He was born in Mexico November 1947 in Cuidad Madero on the Gulf of Mexico near Tampico. It was a fishing, railroad and petroleum center at that time and his grandfather was a railroad engineer. Jose lived there for the first seven years of his life. His father was a bracero (farmworkers recruited by the United States government), in Arizona during WWII. In 1950 he migrated to California and work and in 1955 he went back to Cuidad Madero, Mexico to bring his family to Chicago. By that fall Jose was attending 3rd grade in a Catholic grade school.

At that time given that “bilingual education” did not exist in most schools Jose was trusted into “pure English immersion” and by fifth grade he knew English quite well.

Jose recounts how that experience was traumatic. Having moved from a tropical setting to the foreboding and cold fall followed by winter was something he was not prepared for. He acclimated as best as he could and soon showed promise being two years ahead in math compared to his classmates. During his teen years he attended public high school. He went on to college at the University of Illinois in Chicago and graduated with a history degree. When asked why he was motivated to study history he reiterated his need to combat negative stereotypes perpetuated against Latinos, particularly as it related to Mexicans/Mexican Americans. Later he completed his post graduate work at the University of California at Berkley. His first university teaching job was at Marquette University Activity in Milwaukee starting in 1983 where he remained before coming to Wayne State as the director for Chicano Boricua Studies Center. At Wayne he recalls immediately being swept up not only with the administrative matters related to running a university department/center but also having to combat the ever-present perception among many within the university that Chicano Boricua Studies was a racial program. He quickly focused on changing that image in addition to strengthening the department by adding more staff in order to more effectively serve its students. Soon an assistant director for recruitment and two counselors were hired. He is especially proud of the depth of student services provided by the Center which did much to insure student success. Most of these retention and success efforts did not come from institutional university support. Staff had to work extra hard to find “soft monies”, most often from outside sources. All the while he had to advocate on behalf of the Center by pushing for it to be “institutionalized” within the university structure.

Jose counted off some of the major achievements of department staff during his tenure. Among them were the following: 1) ongoing and vibrant outreach to Detroit’s Latino community, 2)which led to the significant promotion for and the creation and publishing of the early 90’s “Detroit Latino Agenda” which involved many community organizations and activists (including yours truly), 3)insuring a strong continuous Latino presence at the university, 4)being a strong advocate on campus for Latino students when needed 5)using his Berkley PhD credentials to validate a new center (new courses 6) establishing and organizing the annual Wayne State “Breaking the Barriers” Conference which focused on the themes highlighted in the Detroit Latino Agenda, 7) facilitating bridges between community advocates and university administration 8) setting up University Advisory and Community Advisory boards for the Center, 9) sponsoring a number of community programs such as their collaboration with southwest Detroit’s Bowden Branch Library on an annual Wayne State “Breaking the Barriers” Conference which focused on the themes highlighted in the Detroit Latino Agenda, 10) sponsoring a number of nationally known speakers at the University.

He is pleased that the center now has three tenured professors. Nonetheless he warns that the community must not become complacent and let its guard down since the University has yet to commit the Center remains open. The Center’s future is not guaranteed and definitely not automatic. He pointed out some key university administrators on occasion have supported the Center’s model and services and advocated for it but the strength of that support has changed often with changes within the university’s administration. He feels the community must remain vigilant and continue to use any leverage it has to bring continued pressure on the university.

When asked to reflect on his time with the Center and what he feels he has contributed to CBS and its students his immediate response was that he hopes students seriously to have their commitment they study current affairs and become critical thinkers. He knows the community wants and needs a “pipeline” to the university thus it has to constantly work to make sure that is maintain and even strengthened.