

## Front Page News

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### RCC inaugurates Latino Family Night in White City



JULIE ANDERSON / Daily Courier

Jacob Gonzalez (left), 8, and his sister Jacqueline, 4, make beaded necklaces while their mom collects information on continuing higher education during the Latino Family Night that was held at Rogue Community College's Table Rock campus on Thursday. The event encouraged people from Jackson County's growing Hispanic population to bring their family members while learning about many of the educational programs that RCC offers as well as other supportive services.

**By Cara Denney of the Daily Courier**

WHITE CITY — Paula Gonzalez came to the first-ever Rogue Community College Latino Family Night to get uncomfortable.

"I told my husband, 'I'm old. I'm turning 47 this year. I can't go to college,'" Gonzalez said. "And he told me, 'No, you're not old. You just don't want to get out of your comfort zone.' And he was right. But I'm ready now."

Gonzalez was among the many people gathering brochures and information on Thursday about everything from classes and scholarships to child care and addiction recovery from the many community organizations filling the front lobby of the RCC Table Rock Campus at 7800 Pacific Ave.

Gonzalez considers herself fortunate that her husband and other relatives are very supportive of her goal to get a college degree, the first in her family for as far back as anyone can remember.

Gonzalez's story is the kind that Tiffany Malsberger, director of admissions and recruitment at RCC, likes to hear and is the motivation behind the event specifically reaching out to the Hispanic community in the Rogue Valley.

"Sometimes, if no one in someone's family has ever been to college it can be intimidating. But here, if at least they've put their foot in the door on campus, then it's easier for them to imagine themselves coming here for classes," Malsberger said.

Malsberger went on to explain that recognizing the importance of the family in Hispanic culture is why they chose the name "Latino Family Night."

"We didn't want anyone saying, 'I can't go because what will we do with the kids?' So we made it a family friendly event," Malsberger said.

Gonzalez talked to RCC staff as her children, 8-year-old Jacob and 4-year-old Jacqueline, were close by busy making bead bracelets and working on art projects with a woman from Preschool Promise who had Miss Yolanda written on her brightly colored T-shirt.

Preschool Promise, as the name implies, endeavors to prepare youngsters for their first school experience, and the emphasis during Latino Family Night was to offer their

services for parents who might also be preparing themselves for their first college experience.

By registering online, families can find out if they qualify for their children to attend for free through assistance from the Southern Oregon Education Service District.

Helping with the skills to prepare adults to enter the workforce was the reason Esme Gallardo was there from WorkSource Rogue Valley.

Like roughly half of the organizations on hand, WorkSource has bilingual staff available to help Spanish-only speakers.

"There are a lot of people, especially in the Spanish-speaking community, who sometimes don't understand what kind of help we can give," Gallardo said, adding that ESL, or English as a Second Language, classes are one of the first steps that they offer. RCC also offers ESL classes and GED preparation classes in Spanish.

The Oregon Human Development Corporation was on hand getting the word out about scholarships for farmworkers, as well as their children or spouse if they are between the ages of 16-24. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, roughly 15% of the population of Jackson County identifies as Hispanic or Latino and makes up the bulk of farm labor in the Rogue Valley. The Hispanic population grew 37% over the past 10 years. In Josephine County, the Hispanic population is closer to 10% and much more slowly growing.

Two of the community organizations on hand simply to highlight that their services were available for Spanish-only speakers were Creative Supports, Inc. and Recovery Cafe Medford.

Creative Supports used an ARPA grant to bring on bilingual support staff for those with developmental disabilities.

"We saw an open door and jumped on it," said Joe Dittberner, a bilingual agent and outreach specialist for Creative Supports.

Recovery Cafe has long had Spanish language staff and saw Thursday's event as an opportunity to reach out to the community. The nonprofit organization supports people in addiction recovery.

"Our goal is to save lives. And we have culturally specific and Spanish language circles to reach this community," Rico Gutierrez, manager of Recovery Cafe, said.

Breaking cycles that hold people back from success, while honoring Latino culture, language and family, was the common thread throughout conversations that were repeated by those gathered.

Gonzales couldn't agree more. After eight years as a certified nursing assistant at Providence Medford Medical Center, working as a lab assistant and phlebotomist, her goal now is to one day become a licensed practical nurse or a registered nurse and work in the intensive care unit.

"My husband told me, 'Get an education and you will work your head and not your body,'" Gonzalez said of her husband Gilberto, who is a manager in charge of landscaping and remodeling at Rogue Valley Manor in Medford.

She said that growing up, her family valued education, regularly reminding her that "a pencil weighs less than farm tools." Even so, her mother dropped out of college when she got married, something Gonzalez said is fairly typical in the Hispanic community.

"I want my kids to see me not just as their mom, but to be a role model. I want them to see that mom did it, and they can, too. In our culture everything is around the family.

"But you can go to college even if you have a family. Do it for yourself and for your family."

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