

THE MENTOR OF MENTORING

UCSC's Leslie Lopez opens new worlds for Santa Cruz's Latino children

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY STORIES

By Wallace Baine

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SANTA CRUZ >> It's after school at Bay View Elementary on Santa Cruz's West Side, and the first thing you notice when you watch people file into Kathy Chaput's classroom for the afterschool program *Corre la Voz* is that only about half of them are kids.

If you're still conversant with your elementary school math, that means there's roughly a one-to-one ratio between Bay View students and grown-ups.

Most of the adults are, in fact, students themselves, from UC Santa Cruz. They are at Bay View by the efforts of Leslie Lopez, the founder and director of *Corre la Voz* — Spanish for “spread the word” — a mentorship program for Latino students that bridges the gap between UCSC and local schools.

Many of the Bay View kids in the program — fifth-graders, usually — are first-generation English speakers. Leslie's UCSC mentors, more often than not, have the same kind of background and understand the unique pressures of growing up with Spanish-speaking parents in an English-speaking culture.

“We honor their roles in the family,” said Leslie, “because they're very often translator roles. They bring home information from the schools and they're asked to translate at home.”

So, before even saying a word, the UCSC mentors are already serving one of the primary purposes of the program, to provide young Latinos an image of someone from a similar background who made it to college.

But “*Corre la Voz*” doesn't stop there. The program helps with homework and the mentors also engage the younger students in various exercises designed to illustrate concepts of social interaction that non-Latino Americans often take for granted, including communication and cooperation activities like the “Human Knot,” and interviewing and conversation techniques.

On top of that, “*Corre la Voz*” is essentially a digital media program, with a longterm goal of instilling reading, writing and storytelling skills, including storyboarding and camera/technical skills, on the way to making a film.

None of this comes about without support from Bay View teachers. Kathy Chaput teaches kindergarten at Bay View, but opens up her classroom to the fifth-grad-



UC Santa Cruz Lecturer and Director of the Oakes College Certificate Program in Service Learning & Community Justice Leslie Lopez is the visionary who created Corre La Voz, which partners UCSC undergraduate mentors with fourth-graders and fifth-graders at Bay View Elementary School who need to re-classify as English proficient.

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ers and their mentors after school, extending her day by several hours.

“This is something that’s very easy to be passionate about,” said Kathy, “because I feel really strongly about this program and believe in Leslie’s vision. This is where I see an opportunity to truly make a difference, and this is one of the most powerful ways that children can be reached that I’ve ever seen in my time as a teacher.”
