

# Program pushes Hispanic kids to excel

Hispanic Achievers based on popular YMCA program for African-Americans

BY COURTNEY GAILLARD  
THE CHRONICLE

Leonardo Vazquez moved to this country nearly two years ago with his family from Mexico. Although the Wiley Middle School sixth-grader is still learning to speak English, he has managed to make straight A's in all of his classes thanks in part to the Hispanic Achievers.



Zazzarino

"He makes straight A's and his behavior is wonderful. Everyone says that it's a pleasure to have him in the classroom," said Maria DeJesus, who has been mentoring Vazquez for the last seven months. This mother of three sons said that Vazquez's parents moved the family to the United States so that their sons could receive a better education. She also credits his parents' support and encouragement for his academic performance.

Vazquez can read and write English but is still learning to speak the language. DeJesus translates for him when he doesn't understand. Not all mentors are bilingual like DeJesus.

"He likes to read and go to the library. We go to the library together. He gets books and finishes them," said DeJesus. Vazquez enjoys reading science fiction such as "The Lord of the Rings" series. "When we're together I encourage him to speak English. When we greet each other we say 'hi.'"

Hispanic Achievers, a program of the YMCA Community Outreach Services, is a mentoring program for Hispanic youths in middle school. A child is matched with an adult who encourages academic achievement, social



Leonardo Vazquez and his mentor, Maria DeJesus, challenge each other in a game.

development and personal growth. The program began in January. Most of the children in the program, including Vazquez, live at The Ledges, which is where they meet with their mentors several days a week in The Children's Center.

When DeJesus is not helping Vazquez with homework assignments, she said, they'll spend time several times a week playing board games, eating out or going to amusement parks. The two shared a laugh about a past trip to Paramount Carowinds when Vazquez coaxed DeJesus into riding a roller coaster with him despite her fear of heights. Ask Vazquez what he likes about his mentor and he'll tell you, "Everything. She's nice," with a huge grin. It's obvious the feeling is mutual because DeJesus dotes on Vazquez as if he's her own son.

Math and science are Vazquez's favorite subjects, which explains why this youngest of four boys dreams of becoming a doctor one day. On a recent field trip with the Hispanic Achievers to the Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center trauma center, he was

full of questions, said DeJesus.

The aspiring doctor is also quite an artist.

"He's a wonderful artist. There's an artist (inside of him). He draws so beautifully," said Vazquez.

Program director Maria Zazzarino said Vazquez is one of 24 children matched with mentors. She said they hope to match another 20 or so kids with adults by the end of January. A lot of the children don't have enough to do outside of school, and Hispanic Achievers keeps them occupied, she said.

"Four other children (from Hispanic Achievers) are on the honor roll. It's hard to make straight A's when you do speak English. (Another child) was in danger of being held back last year, but she began working with a mentor and she made enough improvement to where they said she could pass her classes," said Zazzarino, who said the biggest challenge many Hispanic students face in school is doing their homework at home because most of their parents don't speak English fluently.

"(Vazquez) has that inside motivation, but he needs guidance and help. That's what this program is for—those kids who otherwise would get lost in the crowd," Zazzarino said.

Hispanics make up around 5 percent of students in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School System, and Zazzarino said the dropout rate is more than 8 percent.

Although DeJesus has children of her own and a full-time job, she enjoys the time she spends with Vazquez.

"I have a real good relationship with his parents and with his brothers. His parents are wonderful," said DeJesus, who is an educator for ABCD Early Beginnings. "I always tell Leonardo not to feel ashamed of who he is or where he comes from and to be proud and to learn."

DeJesus considers her time spent with Vazquez to be some of the most stress-free time of her week. His inquisitive nature, said DeJesus, leads her to believe that he will go on to college and pursue a medical degree perhaps.

"He asks me a lot of questions about his future education. He says he wants to be somebody and he always says that he wants to take care of his parents. Leonardo wants to be a success," DeJesus said.

DeJesus and Zazzarino agreed that many children like Vazquez who move to this country can excel in American schools if they receive encouragement at home and from the entire community.

City named second most digital in nation  
Winston-Salem cited for e-government services

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

Winston-Salem placed second in the latest ranking of the top 10 digital cities in the United States by the Center for Digital Government. The city is ranked among cities with a population of 125,000 to 250,000 on the center's 2003 Digital Cities Survey. Last year on the 2002 survey, the city tied for 10th placed.

The survey examines how city governments have progressed in adopting and using digital technology to improve the delivery of services to their citizens.

Dennis Newman, the city's chief information officer, said that the ranking reflects the city's continued implementation of "e-government" services. "These new services include online payment of utility bills, online submission of customer service requests, multi-language translations of our Web site, and the ability to access GIS maps and engineering documents online."

"These services are a direct result of the investments we have made in prior years in our information systems, which built the foundation for adding direct services to the public through the Internet."

Winston-Salem will be recognized for its achievement Dec. 11 during the National League of Cities meeting in Nashville, Tenn.

Mayors, chief information officers and city managers in more than 300 cities were invited to participate in the survey. The survey grouped cities into three categories: population more than 250,000, population 125,000 to 250,000, and population 75,000 to 125,000.

## Sculpture

from page A1

nered him national attention.

Black, a devoted Republican, was invited to the White House in the 1970s by President Richard Nixon. He was featured on Charles Kuralt's "On the Road" program.

Forsyth County Commissioner Dave Plyler initiated a campaign to raise about \$200,000 (in cash donations and in-kind contributions for things like materials and gardening services) for the sculpture two years ago.

Walter Marshall, Plyler's colleague on the Board of County Commissioners, recalled that Plyler would often point out the lack of racial diversity in the artwork featured in the old county building.

"Dave would often say, 'Walter, wouldn't it be great if we had a black person among this group,'" Marshall said.

Plyler first envisioned a bust of Black. But as artist Grace Parker Napper learned what a giant of man Black was, it was decided that he deserved a tribute that stood as tall and proud as Black once did.

"My hope for this sculpture is that it will inspire and motivate people for generations to come," said Napper, who first molded the piece out of clay using pictures of Black. The piece was then bronzed, ensuring that it will stand the test of time. Several bricks made by Black were bronzed and incorporated into the sculpture as well.

Black's descendants came from far and near to attend the unveiling. Raphael Black is one of George Black's grandchildren. Like his grandfather, Raphael Black has refused to view challenges as insurmountable. Raphael Black in 1951 was among the first eight African-American firefighters hired by the city. Raphael Black still counts "Trust and Obey" among his favorite hymns. His grandfather used to play the tune on his harmonica. He bought Raphael Black his own harmonica and taught him the song as well.

"He had a lot of faith and a lot of trust in God," Raphael Black said about his grandfather. "He believed in treating his fellowman fairly and working hard."

Samuel Black, another one of George Black's grandsons, traveled from Detroit to witness the unveiling. Samuel Black often goes to schools in Detroit during Black History Month to share his grandfa-



Photo by Kevin Walker

County Commissioner Dave Plyler poses with former City Council member Virginia Newell.

ther's story with young people.

"I am trying to teach them the lesson that even without a formal education you still can achieve with perseverance and determination," he said.

The sculpture is open for public viewing. It is in front of the new County Government Building on Chestnut Street, behind the Forsyth County Jail.

## Environmental Technician Training

Could Be Your Ticket to a Career!

- 210 hours of tuition-free environmental technician training at Forsyth Technical Community College
- Valuable certifications and job search assistance

For information, Call Deltra Bonner,

336-724-3625, ext. 205, or call or visit a JobLink Center

Attend a required orientation session at:

Goodwill Industries Self-Reliance Hall

2701 University Parkway, Winston-Salem, NC, 9:00 a.m.,

December 16, 2003 or January 6, 2004

Call Now!

Classes begin January 19, 2004

# "HOW MUCH LIFE INSURANCE DO YOU REALLY NEED?"



IS ONE YEAR'S SALARY ENOUGH? CALL ME  
Mose Belton-Perry  
3911 University Parkway,  
Suite A  
Winston-Salem, NC 27106  
Bus: 759-3911  
Fax: 759-9192



Allstate Financial is the marketing name for Allstate Life Insurance Company and its subsidiaries. Allstate Life Insurance Company, Home office: Northbrook, Illinois. © 2001 Allstate Insurance Company

**LA-Z-BOY** FURNITURE GALLERIES

SEASON  
of savings

**Recliners**  
starting at \$299

**Sofas**  
starting at \$599

**Sleeper Sofas**  
starting at \$699

**6 MONTHS SAME AS CASH!**

**WINSTON-SALEM:**  
700 Hanes Mall Blvd. at the Pavilions  
Mon-Fri. 10am-8pm,  
Sat. 10am-6pm, Sun. 1pm-5pm  
(336) 765-3336

**LA-Z-BOY** FURNITURE GALLERIES

We Make The Rooms That Make A Home.