

Press Clippings 11/09/19 to 11/11/19

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There are no U-46 related news stories.

---Courier News---11/10/2019

U46 mariachi band teaches kids Mexican music genre

Dozens of middle school, high school students learning and performing the traditional style

By Rafael Guerrero



The Mariachi Joya Dorada student ensemble has 125 students in eight schools in School District U46 this school year. The program started with about 15 students in one school a decade ago. (School District U46)

Coral Lopez arrives 90 minutes early to Kimball Middle School twice a week to attend mariachi practice. Up until this year, mariachi did not exist at the Elgin middle school.

The new program at Kimball is part of School District U46's larger Mariachi Joya Dorada (Golden Jewel in English). About 125 students from eight different schools participate in the free program.

"We were in class for orchestra, and our teacher was telling us about this new group they were forming. I wanted to do something new so I signed up," said Lopez, 14.

The student-led mariachi ensemble has dozens of students from middle and high schools learning and performing mariachi music, what it means to be in a mariachi, connecting or learning about the well-known but misunderstood Mexican musical genre, and finding new ways to hone their musical talents.

Lopez, 14, and the other students are learning guitar instruction, which includes how to properly hold the instrument in a mariachi setting. She is also learning how to sing, something orchestra did not prepare her for.

“For me, I want to sing, I’ve wanted to sing since I was little,” she said. “Now that we’re doing it, this is my opportunity to learn and try to get better.”

Rolando Esqueda plays trumpet in band, and like everyone else, he is learning the guitar in mariachi practice. “For me, it is kind of difficult since I use my air most of the time, and now I have to use my hands for the strings,” said the 12-year-old.

Mariachi music dates back to at least the 18th century, originating in central Mexico. A mariachi ensemble typically consists of multiple musicians playing and singing. The instruments include guitars, trumpets, violins, the round-backed vihuela guitar, and the guitarrón bass guitar.

Axel Solorzano was first introduced to the program as a student at Larsen Middle School years ago. Solorzano graduated from Elgin High School last school year, but this year he joined the Kimball mariachi ensemble as an instructor.

Solorzano joined the mariachi program in middle school not knowing how to read music.

“When I was a kid, I was never into music. Most students will go into band or orchestra in fourth or fifth grade, but it never caught my attention,” he said — but mariachi did.

Solorzano can now play multiple instruments as a result of the program that unleashed his musical talents. He started learning to play trumpet one year after joining mariachi, and in high school Solorzano joined band.

All Mariachi Joya Dorada students start on guitar then transition to other instruments and voice training as they learn, said U46 Fine Arts Coordinator Jaimie Giraldo. Most students are in orchestra or band, although some come in without prior involvement. Six middle schools and two high schools participate in the program, with each school group practicing in their respective buildings. The eight groups come together in various ensembles for about 30 performances each school year, ranging from school to district to community events.

When Joya Dorada started in 2009, it was primarily guitar playing for about 15 students in one school, said Giraldo, then the Elgin High School band director. Budget cuts put the program on hiatus a couple of years later. When it restarted, Giraldo said “we decided to jump all in on the mariachi.”

Joya Dorada does not resemble most mariachi bands. The musicians are younger. The band usually wear black pants/shoes and white shirts rather than traditional mariachi attire. While most students come from Latino families, the program has black, white, and Asian students. And at the Kimball mariachi practice Thursday morning, a majority of the students were girls.

“This is one of my favorite programs,” said Giraldo. “As a caucasian woman, I didn’t grow up with this music and culture. But the more I learned about it, the more I loved it, the community that comes with it.”

Playing mariachi music is connecting Esqueda to his Mexican background, he said. He has a greater appreciation for the mariachi songs and arrangements, such as the traditional Mexican rendition of Happy Birthday, Las Mañanitas.

“I’ve been listening to mariachi music since I was seven,” he added. “(My parents) support me, they like it. They like to hear me learning to be an artist.”

“We have families that are so excited, they get tears in their eyes seeing their kids embrace that part of their heritage,” added Giraldo.

A stigma still surrounds mariachi music, said Solorzano. Despite the use of classical instruments, most people tend to think of it as “background music” at Mexican restaurants, he said.

The stigma is changing. For instance, the Elgin Symphony Orchestra is collaborating with Las Vegas-based Mariachi Acero for the orchestra’s first-ever mariachi performance in March. This visit includes a master class with the U46 mariachi musicians.

“Classical in France was different than in Germany, which was different than in Spain,” added Ashley Schoen, senior marketing director for the Elgin Symphony Orchestra. “Mariachi is another form of culture expressing itself through music.”

“There’s not much complexity in it,” Solorzano admitted. However, the music can be a showcase for what an instrument and musician can do.

“(Playing without sheet music) is a skill that you eventually have to learn,” Solorzano said of playing mariachi music, which is one skill learned in practice.

“I think when you start to do this at a young age, it gives them extra training and practice they don’t receive in other classes. I do strongly believe those who show up to mariachi will excel more in their orchestra or band classes.”

Elgin News Digest

U46 CEO Tony Sanders to speak at library



School District U46 CEO Tony Sanders will give a presentation Thursday at the Gail Borden Public Library in Elgin. (Jon Langham/Courier-News)

School District U46 CEO Tony Sanders will hold a presentation at 7 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 14, at Gail Borden Library, 270 N. Grove Ave., Elgin.

The program is open to the community and will feature information on the latest school district news.

To register, go to www.gailborden.info or call 847-429-4597.

10 questions with...

Teacher says passion is the most important lesson

By Rafael Guerrero



Noris Castro, a sixth-grade dual-language teacher at Timber Trails Elementary School, teaches children from Hoffman Estates and Elgin in English and Spanish. She says she learned something important from a teacher in college who she didn't really like. (Rafael Guerrero/Courier-News)

“10 Questions with...” is a Courier-News feature in which reporter Rafael Guerrero interviews someone in the Elgin area we think you should know and finds out a little more about what makes them who they are.

Noris Castro

Age: 41

Raised in: S

an Juan, Puerto Rico

Current hometown: Hoffman Estates

Job: Sixth-grade dual-language teacher at Timber Trails Elementary School, which serves students in Hoffman Estates and Elgin

Education: Graduated from Universidad Metropolitana in Puerto Rico, currently working on master's degree from Roosevelt University

Family: Three children, ages, 20, 18 and 2

What language would you like to learn that you don't know?

I would love to learn Arabic. It's one of the five most spoken languages in the world. I think Spanish and Arabic have so much common, even though the system of writing is different.

You grew up in Puerto Rico. What places do you recommend someone visit if they were to go there?

The entire island is just beautiful. I guess it just depends on a person's taste.

If you like the beach, I recommend Culebra Island. It has Flamenco Beach, which is one of the top 10 best beaches in the world. We have three of the five bioluminescent bays in the world, and it's an absolutely amazing sight.

Do you have any stories from former students that have stuck with you?

When I started teaching, I had a ninth grade group. I had this student who was average, had potential, but he somehow felt that he couldn't make it, that he wasn't good enough.

Long story short, he graduated from high school. Ten years later, he wrote me a message. "The fact that you believed in me made me become a better student." He was an honor student when he graduated and headed toward college.

It made me feel that what we do (as teachers) is important. Sometimes, the tiniest things we do stick with them. I think that's a story that really marks me as a teacher. You never know the impact you are making.

What's the best professional advice you've received?

The teacher that taught me the most was actually a college teacher that I didn't like. She was a little bit mean, but she said something very important. "If you lose the passion for what you do, that is the day you need to leave the classroom."

Even though she was not the best teacher, she was the teacher that gave me the most important lesson.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

Since I've been teaching for 20 years, I think 10 years from now I'd like to be doing something in education but maybe not so much in the classroom. It's not because I don't love what I do but sometimes the age gap between students and teachers affects communication. That age gap makes a generational difference.

I could see myself coaching other teachers, maybe mentoring, doing something to make new teachers better teachers.

What was your favorite subject as a child?

Social studies. I just love history — history shapes everything, history shapes the way people think and the decisions made and the way languages develop. History is everything.

If you could travel any point in time, where would you go?

There are so many moments in history I'm fascinated by but I don't think I would want to be part of them because of the hardships, especially as a woman. It's kind of a hard question because I think my rights would be affected.

If (my rights) weren't an issue, I would love to go to the 1920s, 1930s, when the Harlem Renaissance happened. When this cultural flourishing happened in the United States, I would have loved to be there. There was a cultural explosion happening.

You've taught at the elementary, middle and high school grade levels. What was the worst grade level to teach and what was the best?

For me, (the most difficult) was kindergarten. I found it really hard to connect with the kids, even though I do love kids. As a teacher, it was hard.

The best would be the middle school levels, those sixth-, seventh-, eighth-grade levels. Kids are developing a sense of independence but they're still listening to your advice, they look to you as a parental or guiding figure. It's harder when they get a little bit older.

Do you have any guilty pleasures?

I like shopping for makeup. It's funny because I'm not really the person to wear a lot of makeup.

Another guilty pleasure is I just love pastries. I'm on a diet right now but pastries are the death of me. Anything that is cream-filled, cookies, pastelillos de guayaba, cake, anything you can find in a bakery.

What TV show/s are you watching?

I don't think I've watched and sat down a program in a year. I'm a mother of three, I'm doing college, I'm in school.

Whenever I have time to watch, I love to watch "The Big Bang Theory."

---Daily Herald---11/10/2019

Elgin High's first sensory-friendly concert aims to raise autism awareness

By: Madhu Krishnamurthy



Sara Carlock of Bartlett keeps a hand on her son Colin, 6, during a sensory-friendly concert to raise awareness about autism Thursday at Elgin High School. He's holding a toy to help him stay calm.



Sara Carlock tries to keep her son Colin, 6, inside a "quiet room" as they take a break from a sensory-friendly concert to raise awareness about autism at Elgin High School on Thursday. He wanted to go back to the auditorium to hear the music by Elgin High School bands.



Jacob Zamecnik, 8, plays with his brother Caleb's euphonium after a sensory-friendly concert to raise awareness about autism at Elgin High School Thursday. Caleb plays in the concert band and the musicians let kids get a hands-on experience with the instruments at the end of the evening.



Wyatt Wroblewski, 1½ years old, scampers through the crowd as his aunt Ashley Czerechowicz starts to follow in the background. Children were invited to march if they felt like they needed to during a song performed by the Elgin High School Concert Band at a sensory-friendly concert Thursday at Elgin High School.



Colin Carlock, 6, holds his head at the end of a sensory-friendly concert Thursday to raise awareness about autism at Elgin High School.



Colin Carlock, 6, of Bartlett, plugs his ears during a sensory-friendly concert to raise awareness about autism Thursday at Elgin High School.

Getting young children to sit still or be quiet during an orchestral performance can be challenging enough. But for parents of children with special needs, an outing of that nature is virtually impossible.

That's why Elgin High School's first sensory-friendly concert Thursday was a welcome treat for Bartlett mom Sara Carlock and her 6-year-old autistic son Colin.

Colin is a home schooler within Elgin Area School District U-46 receiving independent applied behavior analysis therapy. He loves music and has accompanied his parents to performances at community festivals. But going to movies, restaurants or concerts usually isn't an option, Carlock said.

"You get stares from people that don't understand autism," Carlock said. "I get anxiety just thinking about it. I'm more nervous that someone is going to be mean to him and I have to react."

What set Elgin High's concert apart was children being allowed to scream, get out of their seats, walk up and down the aisles and dance to the rhythm of the musical scores. Fidget objects and headphones for individuals with auditory processing issues were provided for those who needed them.

The hourlong concert was designed to raise awareness for autism spectrum disorders. Attendees included a mix of families with and without special needs children from throughout U-46 communities.

"It is extremely important to us to create an inviting and safe environment for those who fall on the spectrum," said Robert Sanchez, Elgin High School's band director. "We want everyone to feel included."

Elgin High's concert and varsity bands and Ellis Middle School's band performed short sets of soft music, less than three minutes in length, under dim lights in the high school's auditorium.

A screen on one corner of the stage showed video clips accompanying the musical themes, including "A Night on Bald Mountain," "March Britannia," "On a Childhood Hymn," "The Polar Express" and "Pure Imagination" from "Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory," providing the added visual stimulation some autistic children need.

Images from the children's classic "Goodnight Moon" by Margaret Wise Brown also played overhead during the performance.

Colin excitedly rubbed his hands together and bobbed up and down in place to the beat of the drums -- a nervous reaction but a sign of his enjoyment, Carlock said.

"We don't get a lot of opportunities like this," Carlock said. "(EHS) really made it clear that we were welcome. I thought (Colin) did pretty well. He's into country music and Pearl Jam. He's a (sensory) seeker. There are kids with autism who are the opposite. If there's more events like this, it really helps. The pressure is taken off."

If overwhelmed, children could retreat into "quiet rooms" set up with lower lighting and puzzles to engage them.

"It all depends on the student. Some like the Zen-like music but others like loud music, drums and the vibration," said Caiti Druger, EHS assistant principal of student services and special education administrator. "This is for them to be who they are. They don't have to be quiet here."

Having a sensory-friendly musical experience for students with autism and cognitive and intellectual disabilities might be a first step toward creating an inclusive music program for all students at Elgin High, Druger said.

She added, another such concert will be planned in the spring.

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SPORTS

---Daily Herald---11/10/2019

Brother Rice pulls away from South Elgin in 2nd half

By: Jerry Fitzpatrick

The Brother Rice defense started strong and grew into a monster.

The South Elgin offense scored 7 points and gained 75 yards in the first half of Saturday's Class 8A second-round playoff game in Chicago, but a Crusaders' halftime defensive adjustment suffocated the Storm.

Leading 8-7 at halftime, No. 24 Brother Rice (7-4) surprised No. 8 South Elgin (9-2) by switching to a 3-3 stack, a defensive scheme "they haven't run all season long," Storm coach Dragan Teonic said.

Five South Elgin second-half possessions netted -11 yards and spelled the end of the road for the Upstate Eight Conference co-champions. They punted three times, turned the ball over on downs and threw a late interception.

Meanwhile, the Crusaders pulled away by gaining 165 second-half yards and scoring 17 points for a 25-7 win. They advance to a quarterfinal against No. 1 Minooka (11-0), which defeated No. 16 Edwardsville 34-17.

The Crusaders typically play a four-man defensive front, but they stacked three linebackers behind three linemen to present South Elgin with a different look.

"We've got some guys up front who can definitely play that zero technique where you can play two gaps," Crusaders coach Brian Badke said of 235-pound senior Justin Jefferson and 220-pound senior Alex Roach. "We just always wanted to have another option and have a three-man front to defend that."

South Elgin played toe-to-toe with the 2018 Class 8A runner-up for the first 24 minutes.

The teams played a scoreless first quarter before the Crusaders dented the scoring column on a 1-yard keeper by quarterback Jack Lausch. The sophomore scored on fourth-and-goal with seven minutes left in the half, but the 2-point conversion pass was dropped.

The Storm answered with what proved to be their best drive of the game. Senior Marcus Gillespie III converted on fourth-and-1 from the South Elgin 44-yard line on a 2-yard pitch from quarterback Ben Karpowicz.

Shiking Marshall then raced 46 yards on a misdirection play to the 8-yard line. Karpowicz connected with 6-foot-3 senior receiver Calin Gurau for a touchdown on the next play. Drew Bucaro's extra point staked the Storm to their only lead, 7-6, with 4:15 left in the second quarter.

However, Brother Rice grabbed the lead back before halftime. Junior Mick Badke, who missed his sophomore season due to a knee injury, sacked Karpowicz for an 11-yard loss to the South Elgin 4-yard line. Badke blitzed again on the ensuing play with the Storm offense misaligned and tackled Gillespie in the end zone for a safety that vaulted the Crusaders to an 8-7 lead with 1:25 left in the half.

"We should have had the lead at half," Teonic said.

Freshman kicker Jack Welniak's 27-yard field goal extended the Brother Rice lead to 11-7 midway through the third quarter. Lausch capped a 7-play, 63-yard drive with an 11-yard touchdown, and Willie Shaw scored on an 18-yard run with 6:10 remaining to complete the scoring.

Afterward, the Storm spent 30 minutes exchanging hugs, shedding tears and soaking up their final moments as one of the most successful teams in South Elgin history.

"It's just an incredible group of kids," Teonic said. "It's so different in today's society just to see a bunch of kids come together in a group and pull in the same direction. How fun is that? Everything is so me, me, me with Instagram and Snapchat and every kid in the hallways has his earbuds in and no one talks to anybody. Just to have a family and a group of kids that pulls together and a coaching staff that's willing to put in long hours, I've just enjoyed the heck out of it."

What did the experience mean to the players?

"It means everything," three-year starter Vince Clinite said, choking back his emotions. "Everything. That's all I can say."