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FOCUS MAGAZINE | A PERSPECTIVE OF THE COMMUNITY AND THE ISSUES THAT AFFECT US

FOCUS

(SUMMER 2008) MAGAZINE

BITTERSWEET FREEDOM

HOW MARIA ELENA PORTILLO ESCAPED VIOLENCE AND DESTRUCTION TO START OVER IN THE U.S.

(PAGE 08)

Four hundred and one years since the discovery of America and the establishment of the first colony of Jamestown in 1607, it's often forgotten that the United States was founded by immigrants. Today, immigrants are still risking all they have to make a life in America. They are looking for the same thing the early settlers came to for: opportunity and freedom.

In this issue of *Focus Magazine,* we've decided to take on a broader perspective and focus on, not only Baylor University, but on community and worldwide issues as well. Included are articles that showcase nonprofit civic and activist groups working to improve the lives of those in our community. The sacrifice and hard work these groups invest is immeasurable. Moreover, with the recent debate concerning border control, the job market and conflicting views over the rights of immigrants, it becomes evident that immigration affects us all.

Included are stories of immigrants' struggles and hopes, wins and losses, courage and strife. John Lee sacrificed time from his family and the comfort of Korea, his home country, to study in America. The LEAF program has provided free English tutoring for those in the community to learn in a family-oriented, comfortable setting, allowing them access to opportunities they've never dreamed of. Maria Portillo moved from El Salvador to America because she was told to "leave or die." Even when families move here for the freedom and opportunity they face oppressions such as racial and ethnic discrimination.

We hope to at least offer a glimpse into the issue of immigration and reveal its weight on our community and the world.

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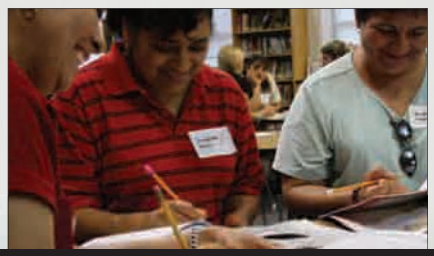


NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

(SEE PAGE 20 FOR THE FULL STORIES)

KIDS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS FIND FRIENDS, FUN AT CAMP JOHN MARC

Camp John Marc, a year-round camp located in Meridian, serves children with disabilities or chronic illnesses. This summer, the camp will host to more than 1,300 special needs children from the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

WACO FRIENDS OF PEACE PROTEST FOR CHANGE IN CENTRAL TEXAS

Waco Friends of Peace hopes for significant changes to occur after the 2008 general election in November. Though the group has not endorsed a presidential candidate, it urges citizens to "Vote for Peacemakers, Not Warmongers", a message that will be presented on a billboard in Hewitt beginning in May.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT LENDS A HELPING HAND

For Waco citizens who can't afford legal council, information about the legal system is available through the locally run non-profit Legal Assistance Project. The program offers citizens information and education on the legal system as well as references on a variety of civil issues.

NEIGHBORWORKS PROVIDES HOMEBUYING GUIDANCE

Waco's homeownership rate currently falls 20 percent behind the national average, but one community organization is on a mission to change this. NeighborWorks Waco is a non-profit organization that has helped more than 1,500 families in Waco become homeowners.

CENTRAL TEXAS EDUCATORS BATTLE CHILDHOOD OBESITY

Obesity is defined as having a BMI at or above the 95th percentile for the child's age and height. The American Obesity Society states that a child who is obese by age 12 has more than a 75 percent chance of becoming an obese adult.

BY AMY McGAUHEY

PHOTOS BY BROCK HARDISTY

BOB MOORE WAS A SOLDIER

stationed in South Korea after the Korean War when he met Kitok – "Kay" to her friends –who was his hunting and fishing partner's daughter. Bob used to joke with Kay's father that he was going to marry his daughter, a petite yet strong woman with lively eyes and a generous heart. The ongoing joke soon turned into reality and they began to date in 1962. Three years later they had an American wedding at the military base in Pusan, South Korea. Soon after, Bob arrived in America with his new bride and they moved to Waco in 1973.

Bob retired from the military and began work as a data processing manager for First National Bank of Central Texas. Meanwhile, Kay was working in a Marathon Battery factory.

"One day I was thinking about it – it was sort of embarrassing for my husband that I worked in a factory," she said. "I told my husband, 'I think I'm going to open a small restaurant.'"

Kay told Bob she wanted to open a hamburger restaurant. Though Bob was hesitant about the idea at first, Kay was determined. One day she saw a newspaper listing advertising that Burger Factory was available to rent. Bob, always trying to look out for his wife, voiced his concern about the location of the restaurant.

"Well, it's a good place or it's a bad place, I have $5,000," Kay told him. "If I make it, I make it. If I don't make it, I don't make it."

The first few months at Burger Factory were a blur of mess and cleaning. The restaurant was one small room with a small bar and a kitchen one-third of the size it is now.

"You should've seen how messy it was out there," she recalled. "It was lots of cleaning and pain."

But the cleaning paid off. Kay began making $25 to $27 a day. The business continued growing and she doubled her earnings and even at one time made $85. She was determined to continue to make more with her growing success.

Kay attributes the restaurant's success to the devotion of its early regular customers, three or four of whom were reporters for the Waco Tribune-Herald.

"They reported how good the food was," she said. "That's how we made it – word of mouth. That's why we survived."

Kay's niece, Po Madsen, a bright, petite woman with warm eyes like her aunt, also remembers the customers' kindness.

Kay credits her successful menu to her relationship with the customers. One of them suggested to stay competitive the restaurant should offer something unique.

From that idea, combined with a Korean pancake Kay grew up eating, the Oriental Fries were born. Kay perfected her recipes by trial and error, using customers as taste testers. They would tell her to add a dash of this or a sprinkle of that. The recipes improved and adapted and Kay thinks her customers appreciated contributing to the restaurant's growth.

"I would work 16-18 hours a day," Kay said. "I didn't sleep but for three or four hours a night. I just worked, but I really enjoyed it."

In 1978, Kay and Bob changed the name of the restaurant to Kitok's. The restaurant was enlarged to its current size, but Kay never expanded further or changed location because of the close relationship they have with their faithful patrons.

"I picture Kitok's like Cheers," Madsen said. "When you go in, everybody who eats there knows each other and knows the family."

Madsen and Kay's family was busy adjusting to life in America. As soon as Kay got her citizenship, she and Bob began bringing her family to the United States.

Six or seven years later, all three brothers and four sisters had arrived with their families. Madsen remembers about 20 of their family members living in Bob and Kay's 3,000 square foot home at one point.

The children would all crowd around the table, spoons clutched in hand, to eat leftovers from Kitok's together out of one big pot.

"When I first came to the U.S., there were a lot of language barriers," Madsen said. However, customers and school mates were supportive as she adjusted.

"At the restaurant, we were like everyone else. I didn't see any ways we were different. The customers didn't care if we spoke broken English," she said.

An unfortunate series of events caused Bob and Kay to close the restaurant in 2002 and eventually sell it.

Even though Kitok's is now under different management, the family atmosphere still remains.

The restaurant looks the same, down to the old photos placed across from the register. According to a current cook, they still meticulously clean.

With attentive glowing eyes and expressive hands moving, the cook shares his favorite part about working at Kitok's: the customer interaction.

He appreciated when customers came to the kitchen to thank the cooks.

Another employee, Luisa Lugo, agreed, "I love working here. I really like talking to the customers. We have

a lot of regulars. It's nice – I don't have to ask them what they want to order. I know as soon as they walk in what they want."

Dedication to providing a family atmosphere and close customer interaction is as much of a reason for people to flock in to Kitok's from out of town as the addicting Oriental Fries and fabled Double-Liplocker-with-cheese burger.

Though they miss Kitok's, the rest of Madsen and Kay's family is doing well. "We are the picture of American success," Madsen said proudly "Everybody has done well. We're all work-aholics. This is our motto: just working hard."

Madsen said that they found a special family in their friends from the restaurant.

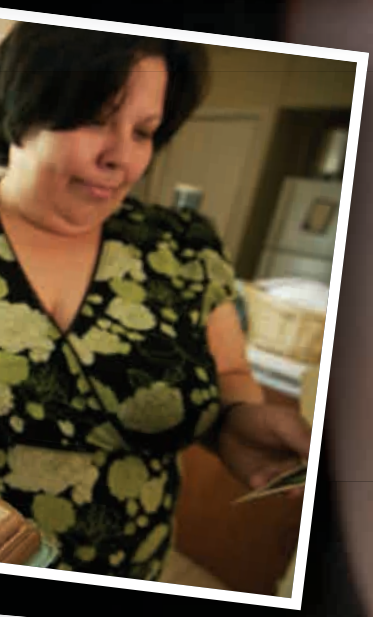
"You know, when I look back, I don't think our success was the food,"she said. "It was the people – the friendships with the people made through the years." •

THAT'S HOW WE MADE IT - WORD OF MOUTH
THAT'S WHY WE SURVIVED.

Bittersweet

BY LEE ANN MARCEL

PHOTOS BY JACQUELINE DEAVENPORT



Freedom.

A boy clad in an oversized army jacket crouches low behind a wall. His knuckles whiten as he clutches the end of the gun that is casually strung over his shoulder. His face is unflinching as gun shots echo off the buildings that shelter him. The guerillas have finally reached the small town of Aguileras, El Salvador.

A NURSING STUDENT hurries about in the hospital. The cries of those wounded in the attack echo in the hall. The student overhears rumors that **the guerillas had set off a bomb in the city.**

"Maria? Maria!" A nurse called for the student from within a hospital room.

As she entered the room, the nurse explained to her that the patient's leg had been injured and might need to be amputated. The only chance to save his leg was with a surgery that would cost more than he could afford.

Maria's face paled as she saw the man on the bed.

It was her brother.

Life for Maria Elena Portillo wasn't always full of death and tragedy. She was born and raised in the tranquil town of Aguileras with two brothers and two sisters. Her mother ran a small business processing cheese and selling eggs in town. Frequently, Maria and her family would walk to pick fruit from the trees that overshadowed her backyard.

"Our house always had a lot of trees," Maria said smiling.

"The avocados were this big!" Maria's sister, Janette said, motioning with her arms.

Maria attended the local college to study nursing. There she met Juan, an intelligent young man studying to become a lawyer. The two fell in love and soon married.

Her brother, Antonio, attended the local military college. He happened to be in the city the day the guerillas attacked.

The rebels came into town on a bus where they suspect they had the bomb that went off, she explained. They parked in a square where there were lots of people. Then the police came out after they heard the rebels where in town. When the bomb went off, both police and citizens were killed.

"There was a lot of destruction," Maria said.

The war was fought between the government, a coalition of four leftist guerrilla groups and one communist group. When the carnage was over, more than 75,000 were killed, 8,000 are still missing, a million were left homeless and another million were either exiled or refugees.

When Juan joined the Salvadoran police force to help end the violence, Maria faithfully supported his decision. One day he was killed in a campaign against the rebels, leaving behind a son, Roberto, who would never know his father.

After her husband's death, Maria clung to her family and tended to Antonio as she tried to finish school and get her life back together.

"I liked helping people, and I loved pediatrics," she recalled. "But I couldn't finish because of the war."

And then one day, the family received a note from the guerillas.

"It told us that we were to leave or die," Maria said. They were being threatened because of their involvement with the Salvadoran military. Luckily, Maria and Antonio were granted political asylum, in which a person persecuted for political opinions may leave their own country and be granted sanctuary by another sovereign authority of a neighboring country. Because of Maria's husband's affiliation in the war and the guerilla threats, she was granted political asylum by the U.S.

Antonio left with his brother, Cecilio, and his father for California. Maria, hesitant to go at first, decided to join her family members in the U.S., but left her 4-month-old son, Roberto, behind with her mother.

Confused in a new country, Maria sought out jobs and eventually found one baby-sitting. A great

language barrier loomed over her as she went about day-to-day life.

"I learned how to speak English in basic classes in El Salvador," Maria said. "They taught us small words like 'table,' 'television' and 'cat,' but no conversational phrases. So it was hard going into a store and asking where the milk was. Everything was just different."

Unsuccessful in California, the family decided to try New York. The thriving, buzzing city was much different from Aguileras. Maria found jobs as a housekeeper for wealthy doctors. A similar position in El Salvador earned $150 a month, but in America, she earned $100 a day. A portion of her earnings went back to El Salvador to help support her family and while the pay was great, the climate was harsh for someone raised in a tropical setting.

"Antonio said that it was just too cold!" Maria exclaimed.

Maria's family friend, Saul, spoke about opportunities in Texas, so the family moved to the warmer climate of the South. Here, Maria found jobs in hotels working as a house keeper.

Though she was making more money than she'd ever made before, Maria longed to be reunited with her son.

One day, the family received a note from the guerillas. **"It told us that we were to leave or die."**

"I was depressed. I cried and cried," Maria said.

It was six more years until her son was able to come to America.

Now, Maria is a permanent U.S. resident and lives with Janette in Carrolton, Texas where she is self-employed, cleaning houses. Roberto also lives with Janette, and Antonio lives in her neighborhood with his wife, Rosa.

Down the street, Antonio barbeques meat on the grill while his son plays in the backyard. Janette's daughter runs in the front yard, laughing loudly while Maria cleans her home readying it for a birthday party. As she opens the door and feels the sunlight on her face, for a brief second the tall oak tree in her front yard takes her back to the memory of the shady trees in Aguileras.

Despite her tragic past, Maria manages to approach life with beaming optimism.

Freedom is sweet, but the bitter taste of the past is never far away. •

IT ALL STARTED WITH A RIVER AND AN IMAGINARY BORDER.

Illegal immigration goes beyond borders. It is made up of human will, desire and sacrifice, all bound together by politics and struggle. Immigration affects every one of us. Those who get caught up in the line of fire have stories of incredible journeys all charged by the basic human need of survival.

The Río Grande, or Río Bravo del Norte as they call it in Mexico, begins in the picturesque snow-capped San Juan Mountains of southwest Colorado. As the snow melts and pure water courses through the valleys, it enters New Mexico and passes through historic ranches, rural country, Native American reservations and old New Mexican towns and cities, giving life to the land, animals and people.

The Spaniards arrived in this area in the first half of the 16th century, when the Pueblo Indians, who had already been in North America for about 20,000 years, used the waters of the old Río Grande for drinking, bathing, fishing and irrigation of crops. New converts to Christianity were baptized in these waters, and the "old person" washed away with the silt and the red tint of the river.

By the time the Río Grande arrives in Laredo in South Texas, once the capital of the independent Republic of the Río Grande, she is a slimy green color and has trickled down into what seems more like a large stream. The river no longer tells her stories of Indian ceremonies, baptisms, fiestas and battles. Once a life-giver, the Río Grande is now known to cause sickness and heartache. It is here, in the lower Río Grande region that more babies are born with missing limbs and organs due to water contamination.

In the end, the river passes through 16 dams and diversions before it reaches the Río Grande Valley at the southernmost point of Texas. The people are forced to use whatever is left of the once pure water to irrigate their many fields of watermelon, citrus and melon.

In the 1990s, the people in the Valley saw that the river no longer emptied into the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Dammed by Texas and Mexican farmers, the Río Grande no longer flows freely.

THE RIVER

BY RAFAEL BENAVIDES

South Texas, primarily the land between the Nueces River and the Río Grande, was long disputed territory for Texas, the U.S. and Mexico. During the land dispute, U.S. troops were stationed on the north banks of the Río Grande.

Dr. Eloísa Taméz, director of the Master of Science and Nursing program at the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College, is a landowner in the ranching community of El Calaboz, near Brownsville, Texas. The land she owns has been in her family for more than 260 years and, until recently, her property abutted the Río Grande.

Taméz has become a popular figure in the border security debate because she, like many landowners on the U.S. southern border, has recently been asked to give up her land for construction of a border fence.

This project, under the auspices of the Untied States Homeland Security, is an attempt to decrease illegal immigration into the U.S. from Latin America. Taméz has declined the request and refuses to give up her land to the government.

The construction of a wall or fence between Mexico and the U.S. represents the "erosion of democracy," she said. "We are being watched by the whole world as we build walls and violate the rights of poor, simple people who live along the river, who still farm the same way they did years ago and who are still working and living off the land."

Taméz said she is not an advocate of illegal immigration, but believes in upholding human rights. "(Illegal immigration) has been going on for generations," she said. "I do not believe in illegal immigration, but it is something the governments have to take care of. They are staying very quiet about it. We shouldn't have to pay the price for that."

According to Taméz, this is not the first time the U.S. government has seized their land.

"People here remember when they took land for the levees," she said. "Either they lived it like my mother who is 90 years old, or the stories have been passed down. I'm not going to be here to see the long-term effects if they build this wall, but my children and their children – my grandchildren, will be here. The impact is not just for us here at the border, it's for all of America."

The people on the border in South Texas have had a long, shared history with their neighbors to the south. Until recently, it has been of mutual respect and coexistence. The immigration debate has proven increasingly complex.

"It is a very, very difficult situation, but everybody has a little part in it." She said, "If illegal immigrants come here and find jobs, there are some people here in America who hire them."

A large part of this intertwining of Mexican and American economics is NAFTA. NAFTA was instituted in 1994 and has had a significant role in Mexico's outward migration. Matías-Cruz has done research on specific villages in southern Mexico.

"I think one of the forces for changes that NAFTA has brought to Mexico has been changes in the constitution and the framework of law," he said.

Article XXVII was modified in the constitution of Mexico due to the NAFTA agreement. The Mexican government was willing to do this in exchange for signing the agreement.

"The social contract between peasants and the government was modified. So now the land is not protected by law. Now the land can be sold with individual titles. What used to be communal property now becomes individual property. So the government started issuing titles of land."

"The Mexican government viewed NAFTA as something that "would save our lives – but actually, it made it worse," Matías-Cruz said.

What Matías-Cruz also saw while doing his research were intentional relocation programs for rural and mostly indigenous families into urban areas of Mexico in order to increase employment and increase wider participation for the national economy.

It hasn't worked out that way.

"Mexico has some of the worst-paid workers on this planet," Matías-Cruz said.

Security and access to justice must also be taken into account when looking at the immigration debate, Matías-Cruz said. Due to political instability, in 2007 Mexicans were the largest applicants for refugee status.

Immigration greatly affects family and the community. Although the men send back money and provide for their families while being an entire country away, many children grow up without their fathers, the culture is forced adapt to the current situation, and the roles of women change.

"There are towns that are only women," said Matías-Cruz. He said that he knows of a community where life-size statues replace fathers, brothers and sons who have left to work. Those who stay behind, in most cases women, receive the income that has been sent to their homes in Mexico.

With that, they buy seeds and hire people to farm and invest in water systems, wells and other needs.

"They are rebuilding their communities," Matías-Cruz said, "The community still practices community. It just happens to be that fifty percent of the population is not in the same territory."

The Mexican-American border doesn't just border two countries – it borders the industrialized world and the developing world. It divides the rich from the poor, safety and struggle, life and death. •


ONE...

TEENAGERS SPEAK

BY NATALIE ADELEYE PHOTOS BY JEFF LESLIE

Have you ever looked into someone else's eyes? Maybe if you looked long enough, beyond the surface, you could see a glimpse of it. Their pain. Their past. Their story.

Tears slipped down 6-year-old Nancy's cheeks as she sobbed on her father's shoulder, "I don't want to be Hispanic anymore!"

Many first-generation Americans from other countries have the same cry: "I don't want to be different!" At times, being a minority in America can be difficult.

In the United States, there are 300 million people with 300 million extraordinary stories. While each story is different, every story is significant. Collectively, these stories form our history as they are passed down from one generation to another, changing lives and making a difference.

America, a supposed diverse nation, has 75 percent of people classified as white, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The other 25 percent is a mix of multiple other races.

America, "a land of the free," is said to be one that embraces differences. In reality, as children grow up and try not to stand out from the crowd, they lose much of their parents' culture. When children go to school, they are taught science, math and the "American" way. When they turn on the television, they are hit with American norms and trends. Sometimes the two cultures are blended into one. More often, the original culture is lost.

"I do feel a pressure to be like everyone else," said Nancy Magana, a 15-year-old sophomore at Waco High School. "It's not good, because people are supposed to be unique."

Neema Syovata, a 17-year-old immigrant from Kenya tells her story on "In The Mix," a Web site where teens express their views on immigration and racism.

"Being an immigrant has been hard," she writes, "but it has taught me that no matter where in the world I am, I should learn to respect other people's differences. If you were to turn us all inside out, wouldn't we look the same?"

Many teenagers already struggling with appearance and body image have added pressures of looking "American."

"When I was younger, I wanted to have blue eyes and blonde hair, because I felt like I didn't fit in," said Maribell Ibanez, a senior at Waco High. "Now, I am happy with the way I am, but there is definitely a pressure to look American."

Many different ethnic groups make image changes as a whole to look more "Westernized". Many African-Americans perm their hair, making it straighter and numerous Asians undergo double eyelid surgery where the skin around the eye is reshaped to create an upper eyelid with a crease.

While the average teenager spends much of his time thinking about MTV, the latest new gadgets and the opposite sex, Nancy Magana spends her time thinking about her family. "Is my mother going to be ok driving the ice cream truck today? Do my cousins have enough food in El Salvador? Should I get a job to help them?"

Most other first-generation American teenagers and immigrants can relate to Magana's thoughts. Ibanez often worries about her grandparents in Mexico as she fights to keep her grades high. She wants to help her family financially because she knows that they don't have much in Mexico.

"I am honored to be an American and proud to be El Salvadoran" Magana said. She values her education and studies hard to make A's and B's in school. When she becomes a senior in two years, she will be the first one in her family to graduate from high school.

"Here in America, I know I'm getting a good education and living better than I would be if I was in El Salvador," Magana said.

Magana has felt, first-hand, the prejudice against immigrants.

"I've been called a 'wetback' numerous times for no reason, or classified with the 'Mexicans' who keep crossing the border," she said. Children have thrown rocks, shot BB guns and tossed firecrackers at Magana's mom as she drives the ice cream truck, just because she doesn't speak English.

Magana's dad, Rene Managua, came to the U.S. because the El Salvadoran government was trying to kill him. Her dad was part of the opposition to a corrupt regime. Instead of bitterness and rage, his brown eyes glistened with hope for his family as an American citizen.

"People want to leave El Salvador because you don't get a good education or get paid much for your hard work," Magana said. "Many immigrants are faced with whether or not to stay in their home country with their people and struggle to feed their family, or go to a place where they will be well-fed and have more opportunities."

Ibanez, 18, has returned to Mexico every six months of her entire life. She said America will never replace Mexico, where her parents were born, but she knows that she is better off in the U.S.

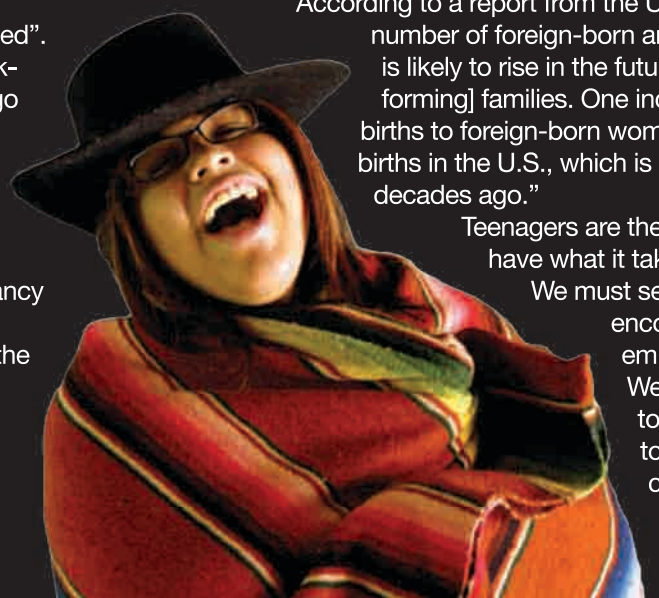
"In Mexico, everyone is so friendly and I get to see my whole family. Here in America, there is definitely more freedom and a better education, but people are also more biased," she said.

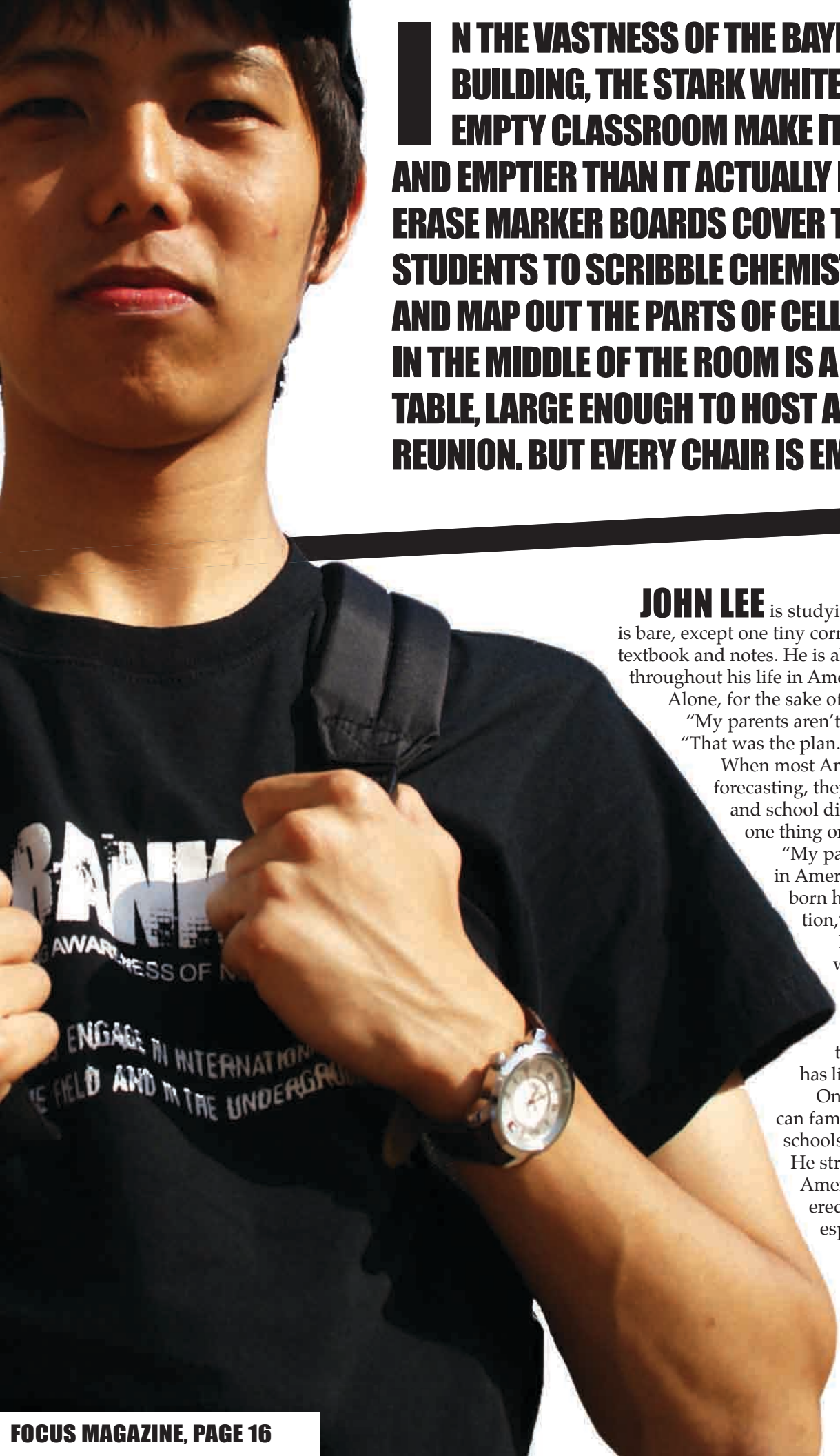
One thing Magana and Ibanez agree on is that the process of coming into America is too complicated.

"I just wish that they could give more work permits and maybe make it easier for people to get legalized," Magana said, "It's not their fault they are suffering."

According to a report from the U. S. Census Bureau, "The number of foreign-born and first generation residents is likely to rise in the future as recent immigrants [are forming] families. One indication of this is the fact that births to foreign-born women now account for 1-in-5 births in the U.S., which is up from about 1-in-20 three decades ago."

Teenagers are the next generation, and they have what it takes to make a difference. We must set an example for them and encourage them to be unique and embrace their various cultures. We must listen to their cries and to their stories. By working together with one another, they can hopefully make the world a better place. •





IN THE VASTNESS OF THE BAYLOR SCIENCES BUILDING, THE STARK WHITE WALLS OF THE EMPTY CLASSROOM MAKE IT SEEM LARGER AND EMPTIER THAN IT ACTUALLY IS. WHITE DRY ERASE MARKER BOARDS COVER TWO WALLS FOR STUDENTS TO SCRIBBLE CHEMISTRY EQUATIONS AND MAP OUT THE PARTS OF CELLS.
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROOM IS A MONSTROUS TABLE, LARGE ENOUGH TO HOST A SMALL FAMILY REUNION. BUT EVERY CHAIR IS EMPTY, EXCEPT ONE.

JOHN LEE is studying for a histology test. The table is bare, except one tiny corner covered with his backpack, textbook and notes. He is alone, much like he has been throughout his life in America.

Alone, for the sake of education.

"My parents aren't U.S. citizens, but I am," Lee said. "That was the plan."

When most Americans think about family forecasting, they conjure up images of mortgages and school districts. The Lees, however, have one thing on their mind: U.S. soil.

"My parents applied for graduate school in America so their children could be born here and get an American education," Lee said.

Lee was born in Stillwater, Okla. while his dad obtained his engineering degree. Lee spent his first three years in Oklahoma and moved back to Korea until the fourth grade. Since then, Lee has lived in America without his family.

On his own, Lee lived with American families across the U.S. and attended schools in California, Indiana and Texas. He struggled to balance Korean and American culture and still gets "bothered" by living apart from his family, especially on Korean holidays.

Lee now attends Baylor University and is one of many Koreans walking across American college campuses.

According to government statistics, nearly 59,000 students

KOREAN SACRIFICE

BY KATE GRONEWALD PHOTOS BY LINDSAY HARRISON

from South Korea attend colleges in the U.S. This figure makes Koreans are the third-largest group of foreign nationals, as reported last year by The Chronicle of Higher Education.

Not all of these students' parents planned ahead like the Lees. Many are foreign-born.

U.S. Census Bureau data reveals that 69 percent of foreign-born Americans are from Asia. To localize that astounding figure, 16 percent of Texans were born in Asia. And counting.

This includes Michelle Hong's parents, who have been Texas residents for over 20 years. Hong, a Baylor junior and president of the Korean Student Association, grew up in Plano, in the suburban middle class of American culture. But culture takes awhile to grow on you. Hong was in ESL until the fourth grade. While Hong has always lived in Texas, several of her Korean friends have experienced a life more like Lee's. Hong said that Korean families who want their kids to receive an American education will "find and pay someone to basically foster them here." Lee's three best friends at Baylor were also born in the U.S. during their parents' college years and lead a similar lifestyle.

"It makes me proud that people from around the world send their kids to get an American education," Hong said.

As parents, the Lees valued American education enough to send their only children, two boys, across the globe for the bulk of their lives. Not surprisingly, such sacrifices present their own set of pressures.

"I feel I have to prove to my parents I can excel at this, because my they have showed me that it's a privilege," Lee said. "It's a blessing."

Both of Lee's parents were born in Seoul, and now live in Taejon, Korea. This is the town Lee visits over Christmas and summer break. He also experienced his earliest school years in Korea.

With the number of Asian-Americans increasing both nationwide and specifically in Texas, employers will encounter more potential hires like John, who possess an overwhelming appreciation for education and the persistent hard work it has required.

"I value work ethic more than simply being smart," Lee said.

Lee and his friend each say they'll look for jobs here when they graduate. Hong also admitted that a U.S. citizen is more likely to get into professional school than an exchange

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student. Graduate degree goals are common among Asian students, especially in the science building. The majority of Lee's best friends plan to attend medical or dental school.

While this specific group of friends' future jobs may benefit the healthcare industry, many say they'll seek employment during graduate school or even take a year off to work before enrolling.

Lee's older brother lives in Fort Worth and has a part-time job while he works his way through medical school. Lee says his American education is worth his unique, sometimes lonely lifestyle and the well-worn soul of a survivor appears through his boyish grin.

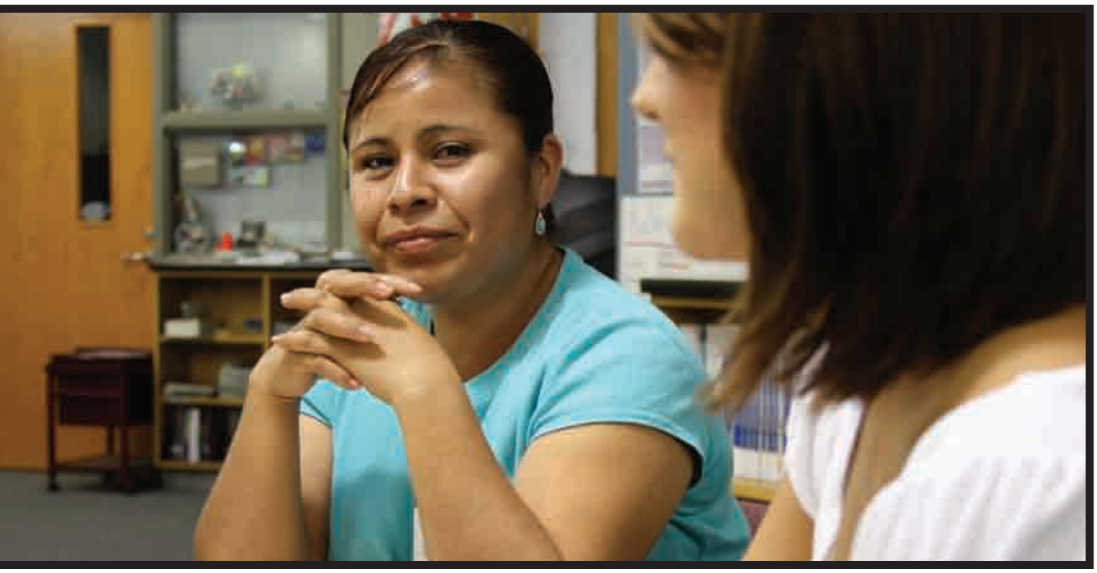
"I may move back to Korea when I get old," Lee said. "It would feel more comfortable."

For now though, Lee and his friends join the thousands of foreign nationals finishing their college educations. Employers, take note. Many will soon seek jobs near you. And, if the past is any indication of the future, they will be trusted, indispensible employees. •

BY MELISSA LIMMER PHOTOS BY LAURISA LOPEZ

ESPERANZA
(spanish for hope)

It's 5:30 p.m. and the halls of César Chávez Professional Development Middle School are empty except for a few stragglers waiting to be picked up from after-school activities and an occasional custodian doing the nightly cleaning. The once bustling hallways are humming with a quiet melody of broken English and Spanish drifting from the library and echoing through the tiled halls.



This melody is the song of hope, the song of an immigrant community struggling to find their way and survive in a new culture and country. This song is LEAF.

Every Thursday from 5:30 to 7 p.m., families from the middle school's surrounding neighborhood meet for English as a second language (ESL) classes called LEAF or Learning English Among Friends.

LEAF first began as a simple request from Dr. Randy M. Wood, director of the center for Christian education and the associate director of the center for literacy in Baylor's school of Education. Working as the university liaison at César Chávez and teaching his own classes at the school, Wood saw a distinct need that was keeping students from reaching their potential.

With the help of Principal Loredo, Wood began a tutoring program for 25 struggling students after school to help them pass the state mandated TAKS test. What began as a small labor of love has grown into a community-wide ESL program boasting 350 students and 100 volunteers.

Created in 2003, LEAF now has spread beyond César Chávez and the South Waco community. There are now six locations, including Carver Professional Development Middle School, Lake Air Middle School, Brazos Middle School, University Middle School and Waco High Professional Development School. Wood hopes that the program will grow to 600 participants by the end of this year.

While parents attend English classes, their children attend one of three programs.

In "Avance" licensed child care providers watch babies, while in "LEAF kids" four to six-year-old children work with elementary education students on primary lessons like colors and shapes. Students in grades 1st through 6th work on homework and get one-on-one tutoring.

Jessica Meehan, a Baylor graduate student and one of LEAF's chief volunteers, taught ESL and bilingual classes at Bell's Hill Elementary before going back to school. She joined LEAF because many of her previous students now attend César Chávez. "(LEAF) really gets the parents involved in school," she said. "They are feeling more confident and help their kids with their homework…that's really big."

The location, classes and family-based program-everything- is intentional, right down to the name of the program.

"All education is about relationships," Wood said. "If you do that people move forward."

While most ESL classes are 30 students to one teacher, LEAF classes are kept to small group sizes of three to four adult students per teacher to mirror the size of a small family.

Another relationship is growing;

Baylor teachers are becoming the students and learning from the parents they teach English to. Freshman volunteer Candace Powell said she has learned a great deal about Spanish culture, and talking with the students has helped her in her own Spanish class.

"Students lives are richer because of the families they have met," Wood said. For many Baylor students this is the first time they've even met an immigrant or interacted with one on a personal level, he said. They get a first hand experience in an issue they would have otherwise just heard on the news or read about.

Perhaps the most important relationship being built is between the LEAF program at César Chávez and the neighborhood it calls home. A sense of pride in the community is building here, and learning English is "the beginning of pride in the community," Wood said.

Wood described the "goosebump" feeling the first day of LEAF when the middle school students walked hand in hand bringing their parents to school. The students want their parents to speak English and they are proud of them for learning.

Families also take pride in their increased opportunities in the job market. Knowing English is a valued and marketable skill for these immigrants.

"To survive in our society we need to speak English," Wood said, but "being bilingual is not easy, or we'd all be bilingual."

Learning a completely foreign language is a daunting task. Many of the fathers who attend the program come straight to class after working eight to twelve-hour days.

Angel Olmos immigrated to the U.S. eight years ago. He has been attending LEAF classes for about three years, and often attends LEAF classes multiple times a week. He began attending LEAF after hearing about it from neighbors and friends.

"My hands hurt from working hard," he said, laying his callused hands against the cold plastic of the library table. For Olmos, learning English is a ticket out of his job as a welder. Olmos described working on a jobsite, and the foreman asking whether or not he knew how to speak English. When the answer is no, the boss points to you to heavy manual labor. If you speak English though, you have the opportunity to do something different he said.

Wood has high hopes that this growing pride and his relationships will translate into great changes for the south Waco community.

"I want LEAF to be the force that stops the cycle of poverty in south Waco," he said. "Education is the answer."

LEAF is also having an impact on Baylor's campus. One hour a week, housekeepers and custodial staff take ESL classes taught by Baylor students. They're paid by their employment contractor for the hour spent in class and Student Government pays for half of the cost of books.

LEAF is a shining example of the impact a university with wide and diverse resources can have on the less fortunate community it calls home. According to Wood, LEAF contains one of the largest groups of students out in the community, with all 100 volunteers coming from the Baylor campus.

In the many immigrant neighborhoods of Waco, where people live teetering along the line of "just making it" and the harsh consequences of "just not," they are starting to see hope to spring eternal.

The melody of English and Spanish that weaves its way down the halls of César Chávez elementary is making its way out the doors and down the streets.

And the song is sweet, for it is one of "esperanza" which the English students now know means "hope." •

Kids with special needs find friends, fun at Camp John Marc

By Melanie Hoo

Camp John Marc, a year-round camp located in Meridian, serves children with disabilities or chronic illnesses. This summer, the camp will host to more than 1,300 special needs children from the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

Each week, different groups of children with different disabilities or chronic illnesses will attend. The camp will alter what they offer to cater to each group. David Aycock, a graduate of Baylor University and the current camp director, said that one of the camp's goals is to build relationships between other campers with the similar conditions.

"We also want them to grow and try new things and develop new talents and hobbies they have never discovered," Aycock said.

Children suffering from kidney failure, burn injuries, Asthma, childhood cancer, heart disease, Hemophilia, juvenile arthritis, Muscular Dystrophy, Sickle Cell Anemia, and Spina Bifida will all attend camp this summer.

"There are kids that come out to this camp that are actively dying and it makes me realize how selfish I am," Aycock said. "I realize that I'm not taking the time to enjoy the life that I've been given,"

The children leave the camp with arts and crafts they have made, as well as many life-changing memories and experiences.

"As soon as camp is over, they start counting down the weeks till next summer," said Aycock.

Camp John Marc is a non-profit organization running solely on donations. A team of Special Camps for Special Kids Board Members hold drives and an annual fundraiser each year.

The board, made up of over 70 members, raises enough money each year, so that the families of the campers pay little or no cost for their children to attend. The camp depends heavily on volunteers. Alise Sams, a church recreation major at Baylor University, volunteered as a requirement in one of her classes.

"I loved it so much that I keep going back," Sams said. "It's not so much what it does for the volunteers as it is seeing what happens to the kids when they are put in an environment with others struggling with similar issues where they are free to be themselves."

To volunteer at Camp John Marc, you must be at least 19 years old and have completed your first year of college. For more information on how you can join in their efforts to ensure that every camper has the right to discover adventure in nature's world, and get the chance to see, touch, play, and feel better, visit their Web site or contact David Aycock at 214-360-0056.

Legal assistance project lends a helping hand

By Kate Williams

For Waco citizens who can't afford legal council, information about the legal system is available through the locally run non-profit Legal Assistance Project. The program offers citizens information and education on the legal system as well as references on a variety of civil issues.

The main goal of the program is to, "make sure people who are needing assistance, but can't afford services are helped," office administrator Corinna Lumbard said.

Lumbard explained that the program does not give legal advice, but provides education and information about legal proceedings, "so people are more prepared to represent themselves because you can't ask legal questions once your in court." Many people cannot afford an attorney to legally represent them and chose to represent themselves Corinna said.

Residents needing help with divorce, child custody, living wills and landlord issues can go to Legal Assistance Project's office Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. for free legal information. The clinic is located at 1008 Jefferson Ave. and paralegals are available to assist and educate citizens on legal issues.

First Lutheran Church of Waco formed Legal Assistance Project as part of an "experimental ministry" in November 2004 but it quickly grew to something much bigger, director of Legal Assistance Project Francine Lumbard said.

"It was thought it would act as a 'transformational ministry' expansion of the social ministries already conducted by members of First Lutheran Church," Francine said. "However, it quickly became apparent that the need for such a ministry far exceeded what could be accomplished by a small group project."

The project's mission has remained the same since it's founding in 2004, "strive for justice, peace, compassion for all persons no matter their race, gender, creed, or economic circumstances, through social action projects."

In addition to the informational clinic, Legal Assistance project hosts free senior law forums every month from 9 to 12 a.m. Senior citizens can get information about living wills, Medicare and adult guardianship.

Attendance varies at each forum with, "as many as 100 and as few a six people," Corinna said. Presenters at the forums include Heart of Texas Area Agency on Aging, Friends for Life and area attorneys.

In the coming months Legal Assistance Project will be organizing a tenants' rights forum so Waco residents can become more informed about different laws and rights regarding renting.

Waco Friends of Peace protest for change in Central Texas

By Hänna Brooks

Waco Friends of Peace hopes for significant changes to occur after the 2008 general election in November. Though the group has not endorsed a presidential candidate, it urges citizens to "Vote for Peacemakers, Not Warmongers", a message that will be presented on a billboard in Hewitt beginning in May.

The Waco Friends of Peace is a group of people in the Waco area who work for peace and justice through education and non-violent activism. The organization started in 2002 by a group of peace activists who noticed the lack of any such group in the central Texas area. The goal of the organization is to bring issues to local awareness, prompt mature discussion and influence others to choose peace.

"We have not endorsed a candidate officially, but certainly as individuals our members oppose McCain as a warmonger and an imperialist," Alan Northcutt, organizer of the Friends of Peace, said.

Leslie Harris protests in downtown Crawford where a local police officer says, "You know the law better than I do, ya'll study that stuff."

Photo by Jade Ortego

Two children play around a peace pole. "May peace prevail on Earth" is inscribed in four languages around the pole.

Photo by Rebecca LaFlure

"I would say that more support Obama at this point, but none of the candidates meet our desires for complete withdrawal of all troops and mercenaries from Iraq and closure of all military bases there."

Waco Friends of Peace is not a partisan organization. According to Northcutt neither the Democrats nor the Republicans are truly devoted to ending militarism, but a Democratic president would be better than four more years of a Bush-like McCain.

"We're about peace and justice," Kay Lucas, a member of the Friends of Peace who also runs the Crawford Peace House, said. "If there was a Republican candidate who was about stopping the war, improving education and the economy, healthcare for all Americans and protecting the environment, then I don't think we'd have a problem. We are not partisan. We're about issues."

Northcutt predicts that Obama will win the presidency. He supports Obama because he opposed the war in Iraq from the beginning and is the candidate most likely to end the war. Also, Obama says he will begin dialogues with countries considered to be enemies of the U.S.

"It's impossible to be sure, but I am hopeful that the disaster of Iraq will cause the U.S. to avoid imperialist wars in the immediate future," Northcutt said.

The billboard in Hewitt, "Vote for Peacemakers, not Warmongers," will run through the election season, funded by members of the Friends of Peace.

"Our actions have raised issues that otherwise would never be mentioned," Northcutt said. "We have expressed the outrage that thousands feel in central Texas but are afraid to express. The fear of speaking out and being different is oppressive in Waco, but we help people see that it's OK, that it's right and that the truth needs to be spoken."

The group meets the second Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. at Poppa Rollo's Pizza on Valley Mills Drive to watch documentaries and discuss current issues. This film-lecture series draws 30 to 60 people monthly.

The films shown at the meetings include documentaries about torture practices, global warming, homosexuality and the church, the war in Iraq and election frauds. The films serve as a forum for discussion.

"It's crazy that we should not be able to have discussions about these issues," Lucas said. "The group is about awareness."

The community's reaction to the Friends of Peace has been mixed. Northcutt said over the last several years the group's protests against the Iraq occupation have received a greater proportion of positive responses.

"It seems there is fairly widespread recognition in the community now that Waco has a peace group," Northcutt said.

Members of the Friends of Peace have protested in the streets of Waco, in Chet Edwards` office, in front of the Waco federal building, at the Bush Ranch checkpoint, on a bridge above Interstate 35 and in downtown Crawford. Northcutt said the group has brought important issues to the attention of the general Waco population through its peaceful actions. To learn more about the Waco Friends of Peace, visit friendsofpeace.org.

NeighborWorks provides homebuying guidance

By Amanda Molleur

Waco's homeownership rate currently falls 20 percent behind the national average, but one community organization is on a mission to change this. NeighborWorks Waco is a non-profit organization and over its existence has helped more than 1,500 families in Waco to become homeowners.

"We are in the business of helping families purchase their first home," executive director Roy Nash said. By helping people help themselves, NeighborWorks' goal is to establish long-term financial security.

With economic difficulty in the housing market, NeighborWorks Waco is actively working to ensure that families are not forced out of their homes.

"When we heard that foreclosure was going to be such a big deal nationally, we went ahead and trained our staff in that area," Nash said. "We now have two full time foreclosure prevention counselors."

This free service offered by NeighborWorks has a 30 percent save rate for people facing the reality of losing their home. In January, the Waco Tribune-Herald highlighted the efforts of NeighborWorks and many attended the foreclosure prevention clinics as a result of the article.

"We want to keep people in their homes," Nash said. "However, people generally come to us way too late." In addition to the help their counseling services offer, NeighborWorks hopes that soon state and national legislation will be passed, allowing more money to be appropriated for rescue funds.

This month, NeighborWorks will host their annual NeighborWorks Week. Each year they select a neighborhood in Waco where restoration occurs through painting, tree planting and trash pick-up. Volunteers from churches, schools and clubs in the Waco area come out to help every year.

In addition to this month's outreach, NeighborWorks hosts another project in October called the Revivalation. This word was created by NeighborWorks to appropriately describe both the revival and revitalization that occurs during the event.

The Pastor's Painting Challenge is the highlight of the Revivalation. The man who inspired the Pastor's Painting Challenge is Rev. Wilbert Austin who was the recipient of the Good Neighbor Award at last year's Annual Breakfast Banquet. Roy Nash described him as one of the organization's most enthusiastic supporters.

Austin serves as pastor of Peaceful Rest Baptist Church in Moody and is a member of Waco City Council. He serves as the representative for District I and became involved with NeighborWorks three years ago.

"I was just impressed with them," Nash said. "They're trying to make a better community and give homes to those who never thought it possible." He can identify with the people who come to NeighborWorks for help because of his life experiences and because of the financial burden his family had while he was growing up, Nash said.

As an active member of the community and as a leader on the City Council, Rev. Austin is determined to work for change in East Waco.

"I refuse to leave with it looking like it does now," Austin said.

In addition to events and outreaches, NeighborWorks' main objective is to provide financial assistance to their clients.

"We don't turn anyone away," Nash said. "You work at your own pace, and if you want to be a homeowner, no matter how bad your credit has been, we can help you make it happen."

Most people who come to NeighborWorks for help have credit issues, but the organization works with each client personally to develop a plan of action.

"Our organization is a strong believer in education," Nash said. All clients are required to take eight hours of financial literacy training along with eight hours of homebuyers' education. If the client purchases a home through NeighborWorks, there are also post-purchase classes available to help the homeowner with maintenance and budgeting issues.

The biggest challenge is to get low-income families qualified for a decent home mortgage, which comes from improving credit.

Since its beginning, NeighborWorks has provided well over $1.8 million in down payment loans, and they work to get clients high-quality, prime loans without adjustable rates.

After the financial counseling comes the purchase process. Currently NeighborWorks has 12 homes at different stages in the construction process and by the end of the year there will be almost double that amount, Nash said.

Some of the homes built are speculative homes, meaning they are built and then put on the market. The majority of houses, however, are custom homes built for a certain client and their family, Nash said.

"We're here to assist the community and to make it better," Nash said. "We hope that people will not only help their family but help their neighborhood by referring friends and increasing our homeownership numbers in Waco."

For more information about NeighborWorks Waco, please call 254-752-1647 or visit their Web site at www.nw-waco.org. You can also stop by their location at 922 Franklin Avenue in downtown Waco.

Central Texas educators battle childhood obesity

By Laura Rivers

There is a problem in Waco that no service organization has yet to touch upon, yet it can affect every family in the community. Childhood obesity has profoundly increased over the last 20 years and Central Texas educators are working to try and solve this crisis.

Obesity is defined as having a BMI at or above the 95th percentile for the child's age and height. The American Obesity Society lists A child who is obese by age 12 has more than a 75 percent chance of becoming an obese adult, according to the Society.

"Fitness needs to start at home and parents need to be aware that they are responsible for their child's health," Blake Schrader, the chairman of physical education for Waco I.S.D. said.

Senate bill 530 was instated to help react to the devastating effects obesity has on children throughout Texas schools. The new required program is called Fitness Gram.

Fitness Gram promotes physical activity for youth in schools. This program incorporates finding an activity that each student can feel comfortable doing.

Schrader goes the extra mile in his classroom at A.J. Moore Academy. He likes to run his classes more rigorously with two to three days of physical fitness required each week.

A.J. Moore Academy also offers an ROTC program along with P.E. classes. This gives students the option for a more thorough physical fitness regiment. There are also innovative programs for physical fitness and health.

Schrader incorporates nutrition into his core program. He said that Texas should require nutrition instead of leaving it as an option. A.J. Moore Academy is doing something on their own by offering nutritious options in vending machines making them more accessible choices for students.

Students are taught lessons in good decision-making, self-worth and self-esteem. These are often the first things children are at risk of losing when concerning childhood obesity.

"We have become a society of obese people and we're just now realizing how detrimental it is to the human soul," Colon said.

Waco is also working to implement better nutrition choices for students. The Waco-McLennan County Public Health District was awarded grant funding to participate in the data collection and survey administration for the School Physical Activity Nutrition Survey (SPAN) project. These efforts allowed the Health District to create a baseline of data on childhood obesity and behavioral risk for children in McLennan County.

Over the last 30 years America has had to come to terms with how important physical fitness and dieting and exercise are. Yet, according to Schrader, Texas legislators still allow things like recess to be taken out of student's schedules.

"Recess is actively seen as a time for children to get a break and play outside but legislators have decided that isn't necessary," Garson Skelton a physical education major at Baylor University said. "This is a bad idea because it's a proven study that after physical activity children have a better attention span and that it is conducive to learning."

Despite some set backs, Waco educators are working hard for the children in their schools to make sure this issue can be dealt with before it's too late.