AARP-Vote/El Paso Partners with Kids Voting/Students Vote Too!

By Kathleen Staudt

AARP-Vote/El Paso had a dream in Spring 2000. Leaders Hector Esparza, Dorline Wonciar, and Conrad Ramirez dreamed of a big candidates’ forum in late September at which presidential, congressional, and local candidates would interact with El Pasoans of all ages at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). They partnered with UTEP’s Institute for Community-Based Teaching and Learning to plan the event.

UTEP has long partnered with Kids Voting/El Paso. Kids Voting/USA is a civic organization that encourages young people both to experience voting and to bring their parents to the polls. Although the kids’ vote does not count toward candidates’ victory or loss, kids’ turnout is counted and their votes are tallied. Kathy Staudt has served on the Kids Voting/El Paso board since 1996, the last presidential election that drew over 40,000 Kindergarten through Grade 12 students to the polls.

The success of Kids Voting depends on lots of volunteers on election day. Volunteers guide kids to their picture ballots and ballot box at voting precincts. Staudt dreamed about the possibility of partnership between Kids Voting and AARP-Vote. This multi-generational effort could be a real shot in the arm toward civic health in the El Paso border region.

Meanwhile, the complicated candidates’ forum was being planned. But after many discussions and letters to candidates, state leaders, and state AARP officials, AARP-Vote/El Paso realized that their dream to bring candidates would be dashed, due to a busy election season and the presidential candidates’ reluctance to spend time in Texas. So instead of the candidates’ forum, AARP-Vote leaders decided to stage an event in the UTEP Student Union on September 21 at which materials would be made available to AARP members and university students.

The AARP-Vote leaders sparked the development of more partnerships over the September 21 event. A new student organization was born, STUDENTS VOTE, TOO!, which aimed to encourage middle and high school students to experience voting. ( Teens had not always responded well to the word “kids” in Kids Voting.) With Students Vote Too!, university students could also encourage informed voting among students actually eligible to vote, aged 18 and over. Nationwide, voter turnout rates are very low in the age group 18-21.

On September 21 at the UTEP Student Union, AARP-Vote hosted tables on voting, driving courses, and tax assistance. Perhaps as many as a hundred local AARP members came to UTEP to get information. Student organizations also hosted tables on voting and volunteered.
to help with Kids Voting/ STUDENTS VOTE, TOO!, on election day. Besides STUDENTS VOTE, TOO!, UTEP’s Student Government Association, MECHA, and other organizations hosted tables with voter registration cards and volunteer sign-up sheets. An “Open Mike” forum allowed student and AARP leaders to speak briefly about voting. A voting machine was available to examine, and middle-school students from a local school took turns inserting blank voting cards. Kids Voting/El Paso Director Laura Balentine spoke to event attendees about ways they could help on or before election day. Several hundred students registered to vote.

The event on September 21 was supreme testimony to the importance of collaboration across age groups on the matter of civic participation, informed voting, and public policies that affect us all. If readers wish to volunteer for Kids Voting or STUDENTS VOTE TOO!, they should contact Laura Balentine (494-3136; balentinel@aol.com), Kathy Staudt (747-7975; kstaudt@utep.edu), or their local AARP leaders.

Training with the United Way Vista Volunteers

During the months of June, July, and August, a fine and dedicated group of 17 Vista Volunteers underwent training while simultaneously working in El Paso’s Empowerment Zone (EZ) neighborhoods. Community Partnerships and the Public Policy Research (PPRC) conducted the training program.

The Vista Volunteers, passionately committed to their communities, bring a wide variety of assets to their work. They are assigned to work with the emerging Community Resource Councils (CRCs) in one of El Paso’s six EZ neighborhoods: South, Five Points, West End, El Paso High/Sunset Heights, Ysleta, and South Central/Chamizal.

Libby Dalton (PPRC), Carla Cardoza and Kathy Staudt (Community Partnerships) prepared a program and manual on strategies for community development for the first few weeks of training. Following that, panels of activists met weekly with the Vista Volunteers on different thematic topics, such as economic development, immigration, schools, health, and housing.

The training, customized for our region, draws on ideas from both the Midwest Academy, a training center for organizers, and Northwestern University’s ABCD Institute, an acronym which stands for “Asset-Based Community Development.” The asset model focuses on the resources of people, their networks, and their neighborhoods through mapping and relationship-building strategies.

Conference Focusing on NAFTA Impact on Displaced Workers Held At UTEP

On October 5-6 the Center for Law and Border Studies in collaboration with the Johns-Hopkins conference held a NAFTA conference addressing displaced workers’ issues. These issues included NAFTA in a “nutshell”, Globalization, NAFTA and Labor, Adult Bilingual Education, and other programs affecting displaced workers in our region. Social implications
of displaced workers were discussed as well as legal remedies available to trade affected workers. Presentations concentrated on the successful completion of worker retraining programs and designing new approaches to help workers and communities respond to this matter.

A film produced by Saul Landau and Sonia Angulo titled Maquila: A Tale of Two Mexicos was shown to give the participants a better understanding of the lives of the people who live in our region. Speakers from several universities and organizations around the country were present at this event.

After the conference a group of members from the community, including displaced workers, public officials, university professors and students and city representatives, gathered together to shared ideas and continue working collectively and find a solution to the problems.

**Partnership Between UTEP Teacher Education and La Escuela Primaira Jaime Torres Bodet in the Anapra Area of Ciudad Juarez**

On Wednesday September 13 approximately 12 teachers from Ascarate Elementary in the Ysleta School District and three UTEP students traveled to the Jaime Torres Bodet located in Ciudad Juarez. There they observed classes and visited with the teachers. The UTEP students read to the children while the teachers visited with each other. Eleven teachers were then picked up from the school and taken to Ascarate Elementary school. There the Juarez teachers were able to observe classes as well and also had a lunch meeting with the El Paso teachers.

The teachers and students then traveled to UTEP where a presentation by the Dean of the College of Education, Dr. Arturo Pacheco was given. A workshop on new methods for teaching reading and writing was given by Dr. Olga Liguori. The presentations were followed by a visit to the Chihuahuan Desert Garden.

The Jaime Torres Bodet School is not a typical school, in Juarez, but unfortunately it is representative of many schools in impoverished areas of the world. The school was constructed by immigrants from Chiapas and Veracruz out of wooden frames covered with cardboard and tar paper and two abandoned school buses are used as classrooms as well. The school is located in the highly distressed colonia of Anapra and is in immense need of supplies as well as adequate facilities.

The exchange has proved valuable in that it provides highly valuable experience for both pre-service and practicing educators. This experience is shared by educators on both sides of the border and helps to foster mutual professional understanding. Of great value is also the fact that the resource sharing will have an immediate positive impact for Mexican teachers and students by providing access to materials and supplies that were otherwise beyond their means.
In November for approximately five days about 15 UTEP students will be taken to the school in Ciudad Juarez to teach science lessons to the children in their classrooms. The UTEP students will work in groups of four and teach for up to 45 minutes. The UTEP students will prepare the lessons and adapt them to each grade level.

In addition to teaching the UTEP students will set up thirty hands-on science activities in the classrooms at the Jaime Torres Bodet School. The UTEP students will interact with small groups of family members to perform the activities. All written information will be provided in Spanish. The Family Science program will be held on November 14 after 2:30pm when school is not in session.

**IV Seminar on Leadership for United States Partners in Basic Education**  
Patzcuaro, Michoacan, October 1st - 7th of 2000

On October 1-7, 2000 a seminar was held in Patzcuaro, Michoacan Mexico. The purpose of the seminar was to gather together all providers that participate in the adult basic education program in the United States. The seminar had information and statistics highlighting the importance of engagement in these kinds of programs. These programs are created to assist and alleviate the problem of many migrants in the U.S. and addressed the need for furthering education for Mexican nationals who live in the United States and did not have the opportunity to continue nor finish their basic education in Mexico.

Dr. Sandra Beyer and Rebecca Suarez ,Languages and Linguistics and Carolina Pallares, graduate student for Community Partnerships attended this seminar and had an opportunity to hear testimonies from elder farm workers that were learning how to write and read.

Here in El Paso there are 10 study groups, two of which are located at UTEP and are sponsored by the Institute for Community Based Teaching and Learning, Community Partnerships, in collaboration with the Mexican Consulate and its INEA program. INEA is the National Institute for the Education of Adults, which aims to help Mexican nationals working and living in the United States to continue or finish their basic and high school education. The goal is for them to receive their GED in Spanish. For more information on this program, contact Carla Cardoza 747-7969 or email at ccardoza@utep.edu

**Distinguished Faculty Awards for Community-Based Teaching**

On September 8th, Community Partnerships held its first “Distinguished Faculty Award for Community-Based Teaching” luncheon at the UTEP El Paso Natural Gas Center. President Diana Natalicio, Provost Steve Riter, faculty members, and staff were present at the luncheon. Faculty received these awards in recognition for their many generous contributions to various Community Partnerships and Community-Based Teaching and Learning projects. Congratulations go out to the following faculty members:

Nancy Antrim - Languages and Linguistics
Center for Civic Engagement

On November, the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) at the University of Texas at El Paso will formally “kick off” its operations to strengthen community-based learning and volunteerism through faculty- and student-driven coursework and service. The Center will build on the multiple initiatives of the Institute (Kellogg, Levi-Strauss, Texas Governor’s office), AmeriCorps, and expected Ford Foundation grant through the University of Arizona, to sustain and institutionalize university civic engagement.

The CCE will encourage a fundamental change in the way the university relates to the communities it serves. It will promote consistent and sustainable partnerships between schools and communities where communities become active players in helping to define issues, how they are approached, and what is done to resolve the problems.

For more information, please call Dr. Kathleen Staudt at 747-7975, or Carla Cardoza at 747-7969 or email at commpart@utep.edu

Air Quality Symposium

The Environmental Task Force sponsored by the Institute for Community-Based Teaching and Learning, Community Partnerships, in joint collaboration with the Paso del Norte Clean cities Coalition hosted a two-day air quality conferences entitled, “The Air We Breath/El Aire que Respiramos” on October 21 and November 4th.

The primary objective of the conferences is to encourage environmental awareness and action in the community through an interactive agenda that included a series of presentations about air quality, a booth display showcasing area health and environmental organizations, activities for students, live music and giveaways of non-polluting items. For
more information about the Environmental Task Force, please contact Irasema Coronado at 747-7980 or email at icoronado@utep.edu.

**National recognition**

Congratulations to Nellie Morales, principal at Ascarate Elementary, one of Ysleta Independent school District’s National Blue Ribbon Schools who is the 2000 National Distinguished Principal. Morales will be recognized for her accomplishment in Washington, D.C., in December of this year.