

Reaffirmed commitment

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The latest goal of the League of United Chicano/Chicana Artists is to reaffirm its commitment to the Mexican American community, says Claudette Rock-Tanaguchi, the group's director.

LUCHA, the oldest Mexican American arts organization in Austin, works from the historic Quintanilla House at 1402 E. First St.

The group has long been involved in sponsoring a variety of arts projects, but developing new programs has been difficult in recent years because of waning enthusiasm among some members and volunteers and funding cutbacks, said Rock-Tanaguchi.

"LUCHA's mission is to bring art to the Chicano community," said Rock-Tanaguchi, who is also a writer. "We work to get artists shown that other groups might not show." She said the organization plans to increase the number of projects it sponsors.

In May, LUCHA sponsored a concert at Club Islas featuring the band Isla de Mujeres. Last week marked the end of LUCHA's Festival Estudiantil, in which elementary, junior high and high school students took part in a writing project coordinated by Chicano author Raul Salinas. LUCHA will publish a book of poetry by the students this summer.

On Saturday, LUCHA will take part in a march through East Austin by Cesar Chavez, founder of the United Farm Workers Union, and plans to paint a mural in East Austin in honor of Chavez in the next few months.

As part of the LUCHA's growing effort to promote Chicano music, the Barrio Music Festival is scheduled in September. And a summer theater series is in the works, which Rock-Tanaguchi said will culminate in a street theater production in September.

Although LUCHA's primary goals involve the arts, the group has long been known for its political activism in the community. Politics and the arts do mix, said Rock-Tanaguchi, "either in the art that an artist is exhibiting" or in the process of competing for public and private arts funding.

Originally from the Rio Grande Valley, Rock-Tanaguchi, 28, has worked for community-based groups since she graduated from the University of Texas, where she earned a degree in economics.

"I would like to stay with LUCHA to see it grow," she said. "I believe growth will take place. And I would like to be a part of that."

Making a difference

Ruth Wells, who works with CEDEN Family Services in East Austin, says she has long been interested in working with the disadvantaged.

Growing up in Bogota, Colombia, Wells said she sympathized with campesinos who lived in the regions surrounding the city.

"I used to go out there on the weekends to teach them to read," she said. "With no education they could not better themselves."

After several years with the Peace Corps, working at the American Embassy in Bogota and later in the midwestern United States, Wells moved to Texas.

Six years ago, she went to work for CEDEN Family Services, where she began teaching computer literacy and reading. Most recently she's worked with the CEDEN parenting program, which provides free counseling and parenting workshops mostly for low-income families.

"I think it's really working," she said of the program.

Wells was recognized for her work by parents and administrators at Allison and Metz elementary schools. But she said she takes more pride when children recognize her years later.

"They wave, they say 'Hi, Mrs. Wells,' " she said.

"For me, every time I see that, I like it because I know they are doing all right and the parents are working hard" to raise their children right, she said.

To help James keep up with people and events in East and Northeast Austin, write P.O. Box 670, Austin 78767, or call 445-3615.

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