



RAICES DE MEXICO

Ballet Folklorico 804 Bell Street East Palo Alto, Ca. 94303
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A Proposal to The Zellerbach Family Fund

Raices de Mexico requests consideration of a grant in the amount of \$3,500.00 from The Zellerbach Family Fund toward expanded instructional programming for 1990. Approximately \$2,351.00 would be spent for instructor salaries as a supplement to an estimated income of \$784.00 in tuition fees paid by participants. On an average, only slightly more than one quarter of all participants can afford to pay tuition. The remainder of the grant, roughly \$365.00, would go toward the purchase of dancing shoes for use by the students.

Project Background

Raices de Mexico (Roots of Mexico) was founded in 1980 by Ruben Avelar, a teacher at Ravenswood Middle School who grew up in East Palo Alto. Raices keeps the traditions of Mexican folk dancing alive. Every dance has a history and represents a different region of Mexico. This history is taught to children and adults who participate as dancers and as audience. Performances are attended by approximately 15,000 people each year. Nearly half of this audience is made up of school children.

"It does a lot for the kids," said Ruben Avelar. "There is nothing else in the community for them to do. Many kids drop out of school and terminate their journey in life." Through practice and performance, children and adults gain self-confidence. "We see a lot of kids with a new sense of pride," said Avelar. "We see introverts and bumblers blossom as they perform in public. It's an excellent character builder."

Participants in Raices de Mexico are predominantly Hispanic from East Palo Alto and the eastern sections of Menlo Park and Redwood City. These areas of San Mateo County suffer from low income, a high crime rate, and a high drop-out rate among high school students. While Raices de Mexico is based in East Palo Alto, the City struggles to provide even basic services to its residents.

While the City of East Palo Alto cannot offer direct financial assistance at the present time, it is contributing substantial in-kind support. Raices has recently been provided with free instructional space at a City facility. Although this new arrangement has filled many of the group's current needs, the location is workable only for the advanced and intermediate students. These students are able to provide their own transportation. They are either of

driving age and have access to a car, or they have reliable parental or some other assistance for transportation to the teaching site.

The Need

1) Children - For the youngest dancers (beginners as young as five years old) transportation has become a critical issue. Often parents do not own a car, or they may own only one vehicle and are unable to commit to a regular class schedule for one or two of their children because of the needs of the rest of the family. In other cases, the child's interest may be high, but the parents may be unwilling to support their child's efforts in any way. Whatever the case, Raices must be able to attract and train new dancers as well as continuing with those who are already involved in the program. Raices de Mexico proposes to initiate beginning classes at two Redwood City and one Palo Alto school locations and so to eliminate the child's need for parental transportation.

2) Adults - Members of Raices' advanced group (adults) have improved to such a degree that it is no longer possible to incorporate beginning adults into the same class. In an attempt to do so, both instructors and students become frustrated. Experienced members of the group are eager to learn more and improve their technique, while beginning adults must have the teacher's input in order to learn the basic steps. In order to continue to grow, Raices must be able to offer at least these two levels of classes for interested adults.

3) Families - Raices de Mexico is a family organization. In most cases, participants include two or more members of the same family - parents as well as children. The group plans social events together in addition to working together in classes and in performance. They create for themselves a sense of community, belonging and pride in their shared heritage. There is both a growing desire in the Hispanic community to express their unique heritage, and a growing need for positive and creative outlets for the energies of young people and adults alike.

4) The Community - There is another point of view which indicates a need for expanded programs of the kind provided by Raices de Mexico - the point of view of the community served. Raices is the only group of its kind in San Mateo County. It provides a vital and positive cultural link for the Hispanic community to a creative, colorful and diverse cultural heritage that enriches life for all other members of the community as well.

5) The Schools - Raices de Mexico has been contacted by three schools: Hoover Elementary and Kennedy Intermediate in Redwood City, and St. Elizabeth Seton School in Palo Alto regarding a desire to offer an afterschool dance program to students at each site. Principals at all three locations, with their percentage of Hispanic students on the rise, see such a program as promoting greater understanding between ethnic groups and as a means of enhancing the achievement of Hispanic students in their general curriculum.

6) Ability to Pay - As previously mentioned, only 25% of instructor salaries are covered by tuition receipts. This situation is a result of the inability of many participants to pay the required

fee. In order to offer the program to those who need it the most, monies to supplement tuition receipts are crucial. Tuition fees were raised last year and an additional increase is being considered; however, the Board's decision will be carefully thought out so as to avoid excluding some participants, and possibly experiencing an overall loss of tuition income.

In order to make this opportunity available to any child who wishes to participate, Raices must also be able to provide proper shoes for dancing. Later, once the child's interest has been established, those parents with the ability to do so will need to purchase shoes. However, it is crucial to be able to get the children started regardless of their ability to afford major start-up expenses such as shoes.

7) Instructor's Fees - Raices will need to hire one new instructor for the proposed class expansion project. While Raices' current rate of pay is modest - \$10/hour for children's classes and \$15/hour for adult classes - the Board of Directors is confident that qualified instructors with whom they have already spoken would be willing to discount their usual fees in order to work for Raices de Mexico.

The Program

Three locations to date have been identified as being ideal. One of them is Hoover Elementary. Hoover has two advantages. It is already open past regular school hours in order to offer adult classes. Parents who do not participate with their children in the dance program could attend other classes while their children receive dance instruction. Further, Hoover Elementary is located in the middle of a predominantly Hispanic section of Redwood City (just south of the intersection of Middlefield and Woodside Roads) and transportation needs, if any, would be minimal. Hoover meets other requirements as well - it has a stage with a hardwood floor. Board President Matias Varela has spoken with Mike Fernandez, Principal at Hoover School. Mr. Fernandez indicated that they are eager to have Raices' program at Hoover Elementary.

The second site is Kennedy Intermediate. The school's principal Derald Blackmore had seen Raices de Mexico perform, and contacted the group to ask for its help. Mr. Blackmore seeks to incorporate the Hispanic cultural element into his school curriculum for all interested students as a means of promoting greater mutual understanding between ethnic groups.

Mr. Varela has also spoken with Dr. Hill, District Superintendent; and Mr. Hartman, Director of Operations/Support Services. Both of these Redwood City Elementary District administrators have indicated that they would support programs at these two sites.

In June of this year, Mrs. Maioni, Principal at the third proposed site - St. Elizabeth Seton School in Palo Alto - approached Raices de Mexico regarding offering an after-school class in Mexican dance. Wanting to motivate her Hispanic students, she had noticed

that some of her students who are currently members of Raices de Mexico are also high achievers in their regular class work. She felt that there must be a connection.

Mrs. Maioni strives to ensure that the school's program is not only enriching and challenging, but is motivating as well. Because the school cannot pay the group for classes, Mrs. Maioni suggested that children be charged an enrollment fee. However, 95% of the children at St. Elizabeth Seton School are from East Palo Alto, and a large number of these would be excluded from participating due to their inability to pay the fee.

Children enrolled at St. Elizabeth Seton are predominately minority students: 75% black, and 21% Hispanic with the Hispanic population on the rise. Total enrollment is approximately 200.

At all three locations, classes would be taught twice a week from 3:00 to 4:00 or 4:30.

Evaluation

Raices will prepare a statement including tuition income which, together with funds from the grant, will pay instructors' salaries for one year beginning January 1990. Tuition income for the same period is estimated at \$784.00.

The balance of the grant, approximately \$365.00, would be utilized toward the purchase of shoes. These would be retained by Raices unless purchased at a later date by the participant. Please note on the attached list of assets that Raices maintains a considerable bank of other costume items for use by participants who are unable to purchase their own.

The program's effectiveness will be monitored in regards to quantifiable results in both the level of participation and the students' perceptions of gained knowledge, skills, and awareness. It is anticipated that each class would include 25 to 30 participants per semester. Further, the number of students wishing to continue with dance instruction would be tallied at the end of each semester. A student questionnaire will be designed to assess what students have gained through their participation in the class. These questions would relate to increased knowledge of the Hispanic culture, increased self-esteem, benefits extended to their other classes, enjoyment, enhanced mutual understanding among students from different ethnic groups, and any perceived impact on the school community in general. Results of this questionnaire would be supplied to the Fund and would provide Raices de Mexico with a basis for future planning of additional in-school programs.

Funding History

Raices de Mexico received \$850.00 from the Arts Council of San Mateo County in January of 1987 to assist with instructor salaries for that year. In 1988, Raices received a grant of \$2,274 from the Peninsula Community Foundation for a portable dance floor through

the City of East Palo Alto. A second request to Peninsula Community Foundation for \$5,000 in "Neighborhood Arts" funds made available through the National Endowment for the Arts was funded in September of 1988.

A pending application with Great Western Financial Corporation would settle a dispute with the bank over their destruction of a mural by José Antonio Burciaga which was publicly dedicated and originally funded by the California Arts Council. The artist has asked that two thirds of the settlement funds be donated to Raices de Mexico. If fully funded, Raices would receive \$20,000 in general operating funds over a three-year period.

Future Funding

Funds from Great Western Financial Corporation could be used to supplement tuition fees for instructor salaries in 1990 - 1991. Further, it is the intention of Raices de Mexico to seek direct funding from school districts, Redwood City, and/or other private sources for ongoing funding in subsequent years.