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### **Mundos Diferentes works with United Way to raise money for dental van**

By Steve Lathrop  
Albany Democrat-Herald

Although not quite the “piece of cake” that some members of South Albany High School’s Mundos Diferentes Club envisioned, their journey into the world of promotions and fundraising has been a unifying experience.

Club president Ana Mendoza, a junior, said the group found out quickly that sponsoring a fundraising event would be hard work. In this case, that work revolves around creating, promoting and funding a special project through the United Way to raise funds for a dental van to aid low-income families in Albany.

“It’s a lot harder than we thought it would be,” Mendoza said. “But it has really brought the club together.”

The idea came to the group from former South Albany student Viviana Gonzalez. Leaping at her proposal, they decided to organize a Kermesses Mexicana — a family event featuring games, music, dancing and food.

In connection with the United Way of Linn County, the club invites the public to a day of activities May 3.

Children’s activities will be from 3 to 5 p.m. and include balloons, sack races, musical chairs, dart games, face painting, bingo, raffles and Mexican snacks.

Dinner will be served at 5 p.m. while visitors watch traditional dances and the coronation of the queen of the Mundos Diferentes Club. Mexican dancing will conclude the evening.

For questions or information on how to donate or volunteer, contact Gonzalez at the school district’s Welcome Center, 704-2376, or bilingual assistant and club adviser Mary Cuevas at South Albany High School, 967-4522.

Part of the proceeds will be donated to the United Way, which will assist with the van to bring dental services to low-income families.

“We thought it was wonderful,” said Greg Roe, executive director of the United Way. “We’ve tried to work with them to make it not just a fundraising effort but a career-building experience.”

Nearly 30 students have helped with everything from creating promotional posters and selling tickets to soliciting donations from businesses. The group meets daily to work on projects during their lunch hour, and that dedication isn’t going unnoticed.

“Teachers and the entire school have been supportive,” Cuevas said. “Everyone wants to know how they can help.”

“It presents a positive image for South Albany and its different cultures,” said Principal Chris Equinoa, “and it makes a difference in the community.”

Adds Mendoza: “It takes a lot of devotion but we try to make it fun and every time we get something done we feel proud.”

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Mark Ylen/Democrat-Herald

South Albany senior Jenifer Lopez, 18, hopes the Mundos Diferentes club will help break down stereotypes.

## South Albany Students use club to share cultural heritage with others

By Jennifer Moody  
Albany Democrat-Herald

They call the club *Mundos Diferentes*, different worlds. That's the experience they share and want to share with others.

Jenifer Lopez is Spanish and Salvadorean. Olivia Victorio has Indian in her ancestry. Justin Rivera is Puerto Rican and still reeling from the culture shock of moving to Albany from New York just a few weeks ago.

"We're trying to communicate to the school and the people around here that there are different people around here, not just Hispanic and Anglo-Saxon," Lopez says.

"Because you're brown doesn't mean you're Mexican," she continues. "We're trying to stop stereotypes. We're trying to show people just because you look a certain way doesn't mean you actually are."

Not that there's anything wrong with being Mexican, Victorio stresses. Her father is from that country, and its residents have contributed greatly to the culture of the world. But there are other cultures with gifts to share, and *Mundos Diferentes* wants to acknowledge and celebrate them with the rest of South Albany High School.

Victorio, Lopez, Rivera and more than a dozen of their classmates have gathered in the South gym this particular Wednesday to practice for their first public event as a club: an assembly to mark the culmination of "Clean It Up" week.

Originally scheduled for this past Friday, the assembly was postponed, but a performance for a May 3 fundraiser at the school still looms large.

Lopez and Victorio are fine-tuning the choreography on the three dances they plan to showcase: a traditional women's friendship dance from India, a traditional Mexican dance and a new millennium mix of hip-hop and a popular Mexican genre known as *Duranguense*.

The dancers, about 20 in all, have been practicing for about 2 1/2 months, including through spring break.

South, like any school with students of varying backgrounds, suffers occasionally from racial tension. Fights break out, Lopez acknowledges. People misunderstand.

The club is attempting to raise its profile with its performances. They chose the different dance forms to send their message, Lopez says: "It's OK to come out of your bubble and try to see different cultures. ... Come and see how a different culture can be actually fun to learn about."