

News



SPECIAL TO BMN

Flash mob zombies!

A troupe of zombies descended on Church Street on Halloween. Organized by Heather Wallace and Cyndy Kirkland at Cheshire Fitness Club, some two dozen "zombies" formed a

flash mob in front of Red Rocker Inn and in front of a house on Church Street. "It was so much fun," Wallace said. "We were not expecting it to be this much fun."



PAUL CLARK

Plans call for the facade of the old Swannanoa High School to be saved and a new building to be built behind it.

School

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site and checked with the county to see if there was property. We circled back around and took a look at partial renovations to the existing building."

Former Owen schools district representative Chip Craig, who did not seek re-election to another term, was happy to see the Community High School program remain in the Swannanoa Valley, he said.

"It's well-needed," he said. "We originally looked at renovating (the whole building), and that would be a couple of million dollars more than building a new one. So we had a discussion about moving the program. But then what happens with the building? Because it doesn't have a lot of potential uses in its current condition."

Craig said he felt the build-and-renovate solution that the school board came up was a "great one."

"Keep the facade, keep the history, keep that cool old gym," he said. "But yet have a modern building kind of

tucked behind the facade. That saves money and keeps the school here."

The project is now in the design process, according to Fierle. Plans call for a new two-story classroom and administration building to be built next to the existing gym. "But before we do that we have to relocate the daycare that is in an auxiliary building," Fierle said.

The daycare will be moved into modular buildings - a "huge upgrade" over the current facility, he said. Those buildings could go up in mid-April, during next year's spring break.

Fierle hopes the work on the school building will begin when school ends in June. The project could be finished by early summer of 2019, Buncombe County Schools Superintendent Tony Baldwin said.

"The intent of the timeline is to keep a minimal disruption to the operations of the school," Baldwin said. "We always try to give conservative projections for these timelines."

The project will provide an adequate home for a program that's "extremely important" to the school system, Baldwin said. Community

High School, an alternative school that serves 140-200 students, is designed to reduce the number of students who drop out of the Buncombe County Schools system.

"It give us an opportunity to reduce classroom size and address issues that prevent students from graduating," Baldwin said. "We also have a program there for young mothers. That's also a very important program because, if it wasn't in place, many of those students could be potential dropouts."

The county has budgeted \$9 million for the construction work on the project, according to Fierle.

Bounty & Soul extends its reach into the Latino community

Volunteers hope new health event becomes annual tradition

MARGARET HURT
SPECIAL TO BMN

Bounty & Soul's tagline - "nourishing, inspiring, teaching, connecting" - was in full display Oct. 26 as it hosted a one-of-a-kind community event, Felicidad y Salud.

The celebration of health and wellness and rich culture of the Latino community in Western North Carolina was part of the growing Latino outreach program of Bounty & Soul, which strives to improve the health of needy local residents through better nutrition. Volunteers at the nonprofit organization hope it will become an annual tradition.

On a warm fall afternoon, guests from around the Swannanoa Valley gathered to learn about the myriad services and resources available to them. In the Owen Middle School cafeteria, vendor tables showcased the offerings of local businesses and nonprofits. Represented were resources like dental, social and family services, prenatal health, wellness, and school enrichment.

Colorful flowers and balloons hung from signs and railings around the event space; complementary orange gift bags were given to participants. Samples of healthy food, along with recipes, were available. Black bean corn salad with avocado and rainbow noodle salad were offered up.

The Bounty & Soul produce market truck welcomed guests at the front entrance, giving fresh vegetables to guests, just as it does at five free produce markets around the Valley each week.

Maia Price from Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry talked about the organization's medical ministry, which welcomes Latino residents who may not have insurance. She told them how to get signed up for services and about the complementary flu shots available. "It is easy to get established if you live in Buncombe County; we see



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Bounty & Soul founder Ali Casparian, center, extends the organization's hand further into the Latin community.

Latino patients every day and welcome more" she said.

In the midst of all the activity, guests of all ages enjoyed each other while eating and learning. The middle school's newly landscaped courtyard drew guests outdoors for activities and children's activities and dining. Face painting, art and interactive recreation kept the younger guests entertained. All the activity stopped when the winning raffle tickets were announced.

Among the volunteers were students from Buncombe County Early College; they ran the food buffet line, serving fare of fajitas and fixings donated by area restaurants. Others included students from Asheville Christian Academy and UNC Asheville, who made community connections, learned about the culture and fulfilled service learning time.

It was a rich time of family fellowship and culture for Alex Batalla, a 9th-grader at Owen High. He visited with his mom, Ofelia Sanchez, and his aunts and cousins over dinner in the courtyard. Alex translated for his smiling family members. All of them had a great time, he said.

"The best part has been all the good information we got here," Ofelia said.

Bounty & Soul's Latino outreach program seeks to acknowledge and honor all Spanish-speaking communities and to listen to and learn from them to better understand how their needs can be sup-

ported, said Ali Casparian, Bounty & Soul's founder.

"The event was very valuable for us to candidly hear what it is like for them and what they need," she said. Bounty & Soul provides a free weekly produce market in Swannanoa, where 98 percent participants are Latino, many of them living along U.S. 70.

One of the most valuable parts of the Oct. 26 event was the connect and share session, where Latinos spoke of obstacles and barriers and brainstormed with facilitators about possible solutions. Bilingual students from Buncombe County Early College facilitated and translated the sessions.

Bounty & Soul thanked Diana Glass, who helped organize the Oct. 26 event and who has helped create a partnership with Swannanoa Valley Christian Ministry's Latino outreach. Bounty & Soul also extended thanks to Owen Middle School for serving as the event venue, to the many volunteers and Community Foundation of Western North Carolina for supporting its Latino Outreach Program through the Black Mountain Swannanoa Valley Endowment Fund.

Bounty & Soul is a nonprofit hunger relief organization that serves the greater Swannanoa Valley, providing fresh produce and health and wellness resources to families and individuals in need through five weekly food markets. For more, visit bountyandsoul.org or contact 419-0533.

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