



Rigoberto Ponce with UC CalFresh Healthy Start shows children a familiar plate with the five food groups on it during the first Farm Smart Cooking Academy on Saturday, July 8 in Holtville. | KATHERINE RAMOS PHOTO

## COOKING 101

**FARM SMART ACADEMY: Program Run with UC CalFresh Healthy Living Hosts 25 Youths Among Classes for Six Weeks to Learn the Habits of Healthy Eating**

BY KATHERINE RAMOS  
CALEXICO CHRONICLE / HOLTVILLE TRIBUNE

**H**OLTVILLE — Children chopped, drained, and toasted all the ingredients on a hot plate to make black bean, zucchini, and corn quesadillas under the tutelage of teenage mentors on Saturday, July 8. The smell of roasting vegetables wafted through the Farm Smart building at the University of California Desert Research and Extension Center as the program's Cooking Academy kicked off its six weeks of culinary fun. The program is run together between Farm Smart and UC CalFresh Healthy Living to offer an opportunity for youths to learn how to cook healthy recipes.

"We are trying to reduce some of the chronic diseases by encouraging students to eat healthier," said Rigoberto Ponce with CalFresh Healthy Living. "to know that there is something healthy to eat at home, how to cook, so we try to promote healthy eating through the promotion of healthy meals."

Initially the cooking class was going to meet on just Tuesdays for the next six weeks. However, Farm Smart coordinator Stacey Amparano said that due to a strong response from the community there were so many names on the waiting list they had to create a second class for Thursdays.

The program consists of 25 children in each class plus five teenage youth leaders who will guide the younger children through the

cooking process. They also learn about the importance of good hygiene, kitchen safety, food safety, and the academy's kitchen rules that they themselves had a part in creating. They will also be doing all the cutting, dicing, grating, flipping, everything themselves with help from their teen mentors.

The older mentor for the younger children is considered a better learning model, according to Cal Fresh Healthy Living Supervisor Chris Wong, because they are more receptive to the learning.

"In addition to the experiential learning, that interaction with the older youth has a lot of impact on the younger kids," Wong said. "They are going to remember that interaction with that teenager for a really long time, and hopefully that influences them and encourages them to cook in the future."

This week's class had students prepare their dishes under the guidance of their older mentors as well as the adults from Farm Smart and Cal Fresh. There were successes and some hiccups and, of course, a few messes.

The "kitchen" was alive with the smells of cooking veggies and maybe a couple burnt tortillas. Children used the time to cook up their creations while under the supervision of their older mentors and the Farm Smart

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Camila Lucero takes a bit of her freshly made quesadilla during the first Farm Smart Cooking Academy on Saturday, July 8 in Holtville. | KATHERINE RAMOS PHOTO

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Calexico City Council member Gilberto Manzanarez on Tuesday, July 11, is seen showing the severity of overgrowth and unkempt conditions of the pedestrian pathway in Nosotros Park around the soccer field that has been neglected by the city for a long period of time. | ARMANDO MARQUEZ-ROMERO PHOTO

## Calexico Council Member Says, 'Let There Be Light'

**Gilberto Manzanarez Hopes to Dedicate \$500,000 in ARPA Funds to Illuminating Westside Parks Eminent Domain Negotiations Over Needed Parcel**

BY ARMANDO MARQUEZ-ROMERO  
CALEXICO CHRONICLE / HOLTVILLE TRIBUNE

**C**ALEXICO — City Council member Gilberto Manzanarez has walked Nosotros Park at dusk on several occasions in the last few weeks, concerned that such a large public space is without lighting, a problem that appears widespread around many parks on the west side of Calexico.

"On this side of the city, there's no way to engage in recreational activities at night and that is not fair for those living on this side of the tracks," Manzanarez said on Tuesday evening, July 11, while visiting Nosotros Park with a reporter.

On Wednesday, July 5, Manzanarez floated the idea to the public about devoting some \$500,000 in available federal American Rescue Plan Act funding that had formerly been earmarked for repairs to Fire Station No. 2 to park projects, such as lighting, for the west side, triggered by what he had seen at Nosotros.

"I couldn't believe it. I went two times on different occasions walking around the park and noticed that not a single light around the park was turning on as it was getting darker and there were families still spending their time in the park," he said during the July 5 meeting.

Manzanarez's comments came just ahead of a unanimous City Council action that night to spend some \$50,000 in lighting investment toward multiple streets in downtown Calexico, evidence that public lighting and the safety it can create has long been on the council's agenda. It's Manzanarez's assertion that lighting will also equal safety and for those using Nosotros Park and other westside parks.

"When we talk about public safety that also involves lighting, there have been many reports (of crime) on Nosotros Park and it is

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## Imperial Valley Writers Share A Tale or Two

**Mall Helps Local Man Stage First Authors' Event at Food Court; Guests Show Love of Reading Alive and Well**

BY KATHERINE RAMOS  
CALEXICO CHRONICLE / HOLTVILLE TRIBUNE

**E**L CENTRO — El Centro resident Darren Simon is a writer of young adult fiction. With several published books under his belt, he wanted to find a way to promote his own work but realized there were other local authors in the same boat.

One of those local writers was Calexico resident and poet Charlie Zamarripa, who received a call from Simon shortly after Zamarripa did a reading at Enrique Carranza Memorial Library. With two poetry books published and a short story

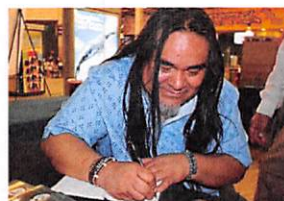
compilation in the works, Zamarripa knew he had to participate.

"This is the first time I've ever been at an event like this, and I was excited," he said during an interview on Saturday, July 8.

Zamarripa, Simon and a dozen other local novelists, poets and short story writers gathered at the Imperial Valley Mall food court on Saturday for the first-ever "Local Author Day at the Mall" to promote their work and for a chance for the public

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**VIDEO & PHOTOS ONLINE AT CALEXICOCHRONICLE.COM**



Calexico resident and poet Charlie Zamarripa signs a copy of his second collection of poems, "Happy Endings," during the first-ever "Local Author Day" at the Imperial Valley Mall food court on Saturday, July 8, where 14 published Imperial Valley writers gathered to sell their books and meet the public. | KATHERINE RAMOS PHOTO



# COOK

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staff.

Afterward the children were able to eat their culinary creations. After making the quesadillas, the children made their own trail mix as a snack before they headed home.

"Cooking is really fun for me and you get to eat it after," said 7-year-old Nicholas Ramos, who said he loved cooking on Saturday even if his quesadilla got a little extra toasted.

Another student, Camila Lucero from El Centro, said she plans to make the recipe at home with her family.

"I just really like to cook, it's fun," Camila said. "I would make (the recipe) at home."

"I just like to cook, and I heard some of my friends were doing it so I wanted to join," said 11-year-old Bonnie Riley of Holtville about joining the cooking academy. "I just feel calm and afterwards I feel accomplished."

Fourteen-year-old Elizabeth Zabala is one of the five teenage mentors who will be working with the Tuesday class, and said she was eager to help with the kids.

"I'm normally around kids and I have younger siblings. I like helping them around the house and in the kitchen, too," Zabala said. "I'm used to helping around cooking a lot. I really like cooking. It's my hobby by this point."

"These are life skills that are going to be really important for them, it's just a great experience all around," said Farm Smart coordinator Amparano as the kids got right to work. "And maybe they can go home and teach their families what they learned, too."

Future recipes will include stir fry, berry French toast, pinwheel vegetable wraps, macaroni and cheese, and more. All recipes are child-friendly and are considered healthy choices, keeping with CalFresh's push for healthy living.

This summer is the Farm Smart program's first cooking academy, something they have coordinated and worked out together with the CalFresh Healthy Living of the University Cooperative Extension. CalFresh has been doing cooking academies since 2018, said Wong.

Currently the only school that participates in the CalFresh



Carlos Lucero, 7, focuses on grating cheese while Farm Smart's Valeria Landeros holds the cheese grater for him during the first Farm Smart Cooking Academy on Saturday, July 8 in Holtville. | KATHERINE RAMOS PHOTO



Brothers Nathan and Nicholas Ramos chop up zucchini under the watchful eye of Yareli Jaramillo during the first Farm Smart Cooking Academy on Saturday, July 8 in Holtville. | KATHERINE RAMOS PHOTO

class is Calexico Unified with the Calexico High School Culinary Arts program, guiding younger students from Dool Elementary School. Wong said CalFresh is currently hoping to partner up with more Imperial Valley schools with this same program.



Nicholas Ramos (center) roasts corn and zucchini on a hotplate during the first Farm Smart Cooking Academy on Saturday, July 8 in Holtville. | KATHERINE RAMOS PHOTO



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