

OHS recognizes Hispanic Heritage Month

By Winnie Wilson

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National Hispanic Heritage Month, spanning from September 15 to October 15, is celebrated to acknowledge the culture and history of the United States Latino community. Year to year, the paramount theme of the month differs, but in 2021 the theme is “Esperanza: A Celebration of Hispanic Heritage and Hope,” which emphasizes a futuristic outlook and hope for the Hispanic population.

At Oxford High School, there are currently 77 kids with Hispanic heritage. While many of these kids were unaware of Hispanic Heritage Month prior to this year, ELL teacher Tuesday Arizaga got an immediate reaction after explaining its significance to the Latino community.

“It’s something they were all kind of proud of. They were all for doing this and they wanted to represent their countries but also show that they want to be American citizens and want to be a part of our community,” Arizaga said.

While the whole month of September is the United States Hispanic Heritage Month, the days in which Central America actually celebrates their independence and heritage do not align with our set days, ELL teacher Charlie Winnick explains.

“September 15 is the day of independence for most of Central America, like Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala. All the Central American countries got independence September 15, then Mexico as well. The Spanish colonies started to gain independence within those days. Some kids were saying that when the schools have done anything for it it was in September, so they were confused why we were doing it throughout the month,” Winnick said.

Participation and awareness of this month is crucial to spreading knowledge of Hispanic culture and heritage across the United States. Winnick mentions some of the reasons why participation is so key.

“It celebrates the diversity of the country and helps show the importance of all the hispanic population and how you can be Hispanic and American and don’t have to lose your identity and both sides of them can be celebrated,” Winnick said.

Students from five Central American countries currently attend Oxford High School. The dynamic between non-native English speakers is quite unique and portrays a family feel, Arizaga explains.

“A lot of our students who are not Hispanic have picked up a lot of Spanish, and they are able to have conversations by being around and hearing these kids. They are a very close group,” Arizaga said.

Many of these students have moved from their home country to the United States recently and have been put into an environment where they are given no option but to quickly adapt. OHS senior Hamilton Cabrera explained his feelings about graduating in May despite the experiences and struggles he has faced.

“This is my first time graduating so I feel excited. There weren’t a lot of people that graduated before and where we are at right now is good. I can set an example,” Cabrera said. “I didn’t know English when I came here. It was difficult for me. Some classes that are in my country are different here and language is different too. I am from Guatemala and I came over here five years ago. I learned English in two years.”

Cabrera also emphasized the importance of



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Top: OHS students with Hispanic Heritage stand together to honor Hispanic Heritage month. The native student countries represented in this picture are mostly Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico, while certain heritage lines trace back to many other countries. 77 Oxford students have Hispanic Heritage, but not all were present for this picture.

Left: Ariel Benitez, Hamilton Cabrera, Yossy Zelaya Juarez, and Jorje Zelaya Juarez stand behind the Honduras national flag. The achievements and contributions of Hispanics in the United States are celebrated and honored throughout September, and OHS takes part in this tradition. The Honduras flag is a marker of heritage and a staple of pride in students Honduras backgrounds.

school and the positive impact it can have on one’s life.

“School is important because with the high school diploma you can do a lot of things. If you don’t have a high school diploma, you can’t work some places. That’s why I’m trying to get my high school diploma,” said Cabrera. “I want to tell everyone to do their best and keep on with school.”

Another ELL student, Yossy Zelaya Juarez, is from Honduras and talked about his life and transition regarding his move to the United States years ago.

“I come from Honduras. It’s in Central America and it’s one of the poorest countries. Some people come to the US for the economy because our economy is bad or some other people come here because they have drug problems or somebody’s trying to kill them,” Juarez said. “But the reason why my mom brought me here is because she wanted a better education for me so that I can be somebody and I don’t have to work everyday like her.”

Arizaga believes that the tight-knit community contributes tremendously to the environment and strive behind these teenagers’ goals. Juarez brings up his personal experience regarding his peers’

influence on his schooling.

“I’m trying to make it for my brothers too because my teachers and my friends pushed me to graduate because I was going to drop out, but my friends and my teachers and my family motivated me to graduate in December,” Juarez said.

While the work barrier often provides difficulty in graduating, much improvement has been seen as students start to realize the value of education. Arizaga talked about the accomplishments of students like Juarez and why it is such a big deal for him to be graduating in December and reaching this milestone.

“He will be the first to graduate in his family. He’s one out of eight children. He will be graduating early in December,” Arizaga said.

While Juarez had no prior knowledge of Hispanic Heritage Month until it was introduced to the class, he is proud of not only his home country but also of how far he has come in America. Juarez believes that a high school diploma is invaluable.

“Keep pushing school even when you feel like dropping out. It will help you when you grow up, or you will change your mind when you grow up and it will be too late,” Juarez said.