

A Short History of The MVMC

Written by Marcia Tendick and Leticia Bentley

The seeds for the Moab Valley Multicultural Center (MVMC) started in late 1999. During a Utah Episcopal convention in Moab, a young man hit and killed a Mexican man riding his bicycle between jobs early in the morning. It was a terrible event and on the Sunday after the convention, the Episcopal bishop called for a gathering of funds to be given to the family of the man who died. Jim Tendick was the priest at the local St. Francis Church then, and took the funds to the man's cousin, who turned out to be Leticia Bentley!

Through the next few months, Leticia (Leti) turned to Father Jim for counsel. She ended up asking if he would be willing to create a Spanish language religious service. From early 2000, the Episcopal Church began to hold Spanish language services on Tuesday evenings. Over the next six years it became clear that there were immense needs in the Hispanic community that the church couldn't possibly meet. Also, Leti received many requests for help from parents of the children that she taught in her ESL classes at the Middle and High Schools.

In the summer of 2006, Leti, Marcia Tendick, Marilyn Stolfi and Hannah Graham traveled together to a week-long conference at the Global Justice Center in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. That experience spurred them to consider developing some kind of center in Moab when they returned. Throughout the fall of 2006, Leti, Marilyn and Marcia with their husbands Scott, Dave, and Jim, began to meet and gather other interested persons to discuss the possibilities for such a center. Leti was working with the group Comunidades Unidas in Salt Lake and they wanted to pay her a small stipend to open an office where she could work with local Hispanics on issues of tobacco use. Mary Frothingham was working at the school district at that time on tobacco cessation and began to intercede for Leti in trying to open the program to meet greater issues.

At that time, Leti directed a youth group at the high school called Amigos Club. They wanted to help raise money for the Comunidades Unidas satellite office. When it became clear that the needs in Moab did not gel with the goals of Comunidades Unidas, they ended this relationship. The funds raised by the Amigos Club were then used to help open the center.

At that point, it was decided to form a 501(c)(3), which could assist local immigrant and indigenous people who were disenfranchised from basic services due to language and/or cultural barriers. By January of 2007, a Board of Directors had formed and Sarah Bauman had agreed to help with the 501(c)(3) application. Terry Morse volunteered to be the chair of the board, Dave Stolfi was the first treasurer and Mary Frothingham was the secretary. That first board also consisted of Colin Fryer, Marcia Tendick, Carrie Alexander and Leti and Scott Bentley. By May, Terry Morse had discontinued his time on the board and Jose Tejada joined.

Most of the first year of the Multicultural Center was spent getting our feet on the ground, dealing with policies and procedures, figuring how to fund the work, writing grants and providing both interpretation/translation services as well as critical outreach, crisis intervention, advocacy and referral services. Mike Suarez became an important legal advocate, helping Leti with many crisis issues that came up. He eventually moved into devoting his time to meetings with men with alcohol or domestic violence difficulties.

Thanks to Joe Kingsley and Jim Stoltzfus and Floyd Humphreys, the center had a home. Terry Morse paid the rent for the first year. It began in two front offices in the building that is now part of Utah State University. As time went on, the Stoltzfus' donated more and more of the building for the use of the center. As we were able to expand, we were able to provide more programs and services. Jim Tendick joined the board in October of that year. Dave Stolfa stepped down from the board and John McQueen came on and replaced Dave as treasurer.

The Center was basically run by the volunteer board including Norma Bañuelos, Norma Costanza, Martina Merino, Kayla Tanner, Francisco Zul, Tereso Bañuelos, Maria Almanza and Alicia Lopez, and hours and hours of volunteer time by Leti Bentley and Marcia Tendick. Tim and Audrey Graham were always ready to help out as well. We began a perishable food drop that first year, and, after receiving a medical grant from the Episcopal Diocese, arranged for a Spanish-speaking pediatrician to come to the Center once a month. We undertook a needs assessment to find out what were the most glaring needs in the community and found that interpretation services were number one for most agencies. An after school tutor club was developed with a number of volunteer tutors who, through the years have included Mary Suarez, Marlene Huckabay, Jennie Weidensee, Judy Savarese, Marilyn Stolfa, Ana Vita Morse, Denise Birmingham, Cooper Schellenbach, Brett Bentley, Jim Stoltzfus, Wendy McDougald, Connie Witt, Emily Svenson, Nan Powell, Peggy Harty and Betty Maya Foote.

Leti was finally given a small stipend starting in October of 2007 and given the role of Outreach Services Director. She continued to donate many hours beyond the time the stipend covered. Leti also served as Program Director, providing the impetus for a variety of events, from Balet Folklorico to Cultural Connections events – both cultural familiarization classes and celebrations during Cinco de Mayo, Fourth of July and the Mexican Independencia and Day of The Dead. More recently, she was the initiator of the popular Dancing with the Stars idea, now in its fourth year of occurrence. She created important programs for the center like the Crisis Intervention Program, Amigos Club, Amigo to Amiguito program, Teen and Family support program and more.

In January of 2008, Carrie Alexander was hired as the MVMC's first Executive Director. She spent a lot of her time writing grants to be able to put on our first big event, the Festival of Cultures, which was held over a three-day period. Moab City co-sponsored the event and closed down a portion of Center Street, where we had many booths. It opened with a parade and we showed films and had speakers at both Star Hall and the library. There was also a photo exhibit in City Hall. Folk dancers and a Ute hoop dancer performed and the event ended with dancing for everyone in the Sun Court.

Carrie's time as Executive Director ended in August of 2008. Sarah Heffron was hired as Ex. Dir. in December of 2008. Throughout 2009, Sarah brought many skills to that position and finally was able to put the Center on secure financial footing. She instituted many important programs and developed a number of needed strategies and protocol that had been missing. During her time as director, a tutor club was developed, a summer camp in conjunction with the park service was created, and a parent and child program for ESL and after school tutoring was developed. Sarah hired Zaida Agreda as Program Coordinator, brought Gabe Woytek on as our first Vista volunteer, and hired Valerie Jones as Tutor Club Director. She developed and instituted a successful Summer Fun Club for over 14 young people, collaborating with both the MARC and the Park Service,

ensured frequent publicity for The Center, writing ads and articles on fundraisers, programs and recruitment and built the capacity to provide better outreach and cultural programming – especially for the Navajo community.

By fall of 2009, it was clear that the MVMC needed to find a new home. Sarah Bauman came back to the center as Project Director and helped us find the house at 156 N 100 West. She took the Center through the entire rental process with the option to buy, and found funding to hire Jeff Johnston to construct improvements. For the first year the rent was paid by Jim and Floyd Stoltzfus, Colin Fryer and Terry Morse. When the lease ran out Rusty Wheaton purchased the property and later sold it to Jennifer Speers who then donated it to the MVMC.

For the first three years of the center, we celebrated the Mexican Independencia in September. In both 2007 and 2008, the event was held at Red Cliffs Lodge, where Colin Fryer donated the food and the MVMC was able to charge for the event and keep the money earned. The Balet Folklorico performed, Leti oversaw the Grito and the awards ceremony for local Heroes and Colin Fryer provided piñatas for the children and grand fireworks displays at the end. On the third year, 2009, it was decided to hold the Independencia at Frankie D's and Red Cliffs Lodge still provided the food for the event. A smaller Independencia was held in 2010, but by then it was decided that the Center would put its efforts into celebrating the Day of the Dead instead which has become the most successful event of the year. In Nov. 2017 it will be celebrating its 7th year! Floyd Humphreys and Marcia Tendick were co directors in both 2011 and 2013.

The MVMC moved into its new home in February of 2010. By March, the Center had gone through an interview process and hired Kandee DeGraw to replace Sarah Hefron as Executive Director when she stepped down in May. By this time, the Board had changed a number of times, with various people taking on board responsibilities for short periods of time – Lynn Carpenter, Chris Martinez, Natalie Grout, Nan Powell, Denise Birmingham, Rebecca Martin, Steve McClure, Gentry Medrano, Ed DeFrancia, Rick Klein, Danette Johnson, Greg Tanner, Sarah Hefron and Sarah Bauman. But longer serving board members included John McQueen, Jim and Marcia Tendick, Jose Tejada, Scott Bentley, and more recently, Gordon Beh and Mike McCue. Jim Tendick continues to be on the board, serving as President of the board since August of 2011. Jim is the longest serving board member – almost 10 years! He was joined on the board in 2011 by Gordon Beh and Michael McCue. The board now consists of those three men, plus Kathryn Sullivan and Tara Smelt.

The Center has had the help of many volunteers through the years. For the Teen (Youth) and Family Support Team, many volunteers worked with students for several years. They included Michele Bawden, Zaida Agreda Winn, Aron King, Eula Gonzales, Joan Miller, Gail Jennings-Peterson, Antje Rath, Ashli Murdock, Marcia Tendick, Rhiana Medina, Matt Sienkowitz and Mary Suarez.

When Kandee DeGraw stepped down from the position of Executive Director in June of 2011, the center hired Nicole Shelnut to step in to that position in the fall of 2011. Nicole moved away and the Center was again without a director in December of 2012. Rhiana Medina, who had been a volunteer at the Center since 2010 as a mentor for at risk teens, filled the position of Executive Director in January, 2013.

Zaida Agreda is still with us after all these years. She has been instrumental to the success of the Center. As the Program Coordinator, she assists with all programs, provides translation and interpretation services, and assists in case management and coordination of services. Zaida is one of four certified medical interpreters at the Center and recently starting assisting with the implementation of the BEACON afterschool culture club that the Center hosts as well. The Center has also had a number of wonderful Vista volunteers, some of whom have now become staff members. Gabe Woytek was the first VISTA and after him Megan Gette served a term. Others since then are Megan De Matteo, Katlyn Keane, who joined us in 2013 and is now part of our staff serving as our Volunteer Coordinator, working with youth and volunteers. Joanna Onorato came in 2014 and also stayed on. After two years of service she is now our Outreach Coordinator. Our newest Vista volunteer, Haley Austin, just joined us this year and serves as Education, Outreach and Programs Assistant.

Many individuals have become important donors to the Center over the years. In addition to enormous financial contributions from Jim Stoltzfus, Floyd Humphreys, Jennifer Speers, Rusty Wheaton, Terry and AnaVitte Morse, Mike and Mary Suarez, Colin Fryer, Carolyn Tanner Irish and the Utah Episcopal Church from the beginning, more recent donors have included Emily Svendson, Lynn Carpenter, Mike and Mary Wilson, David Bonderman, Mimi Leavitt, Jane and Mike Badger, Jayne May and the Synergy Company, Mary McGann and many others. The history of the MVMC is full of many names and it is thanks to these volunteers, participants, donors, staff and board that we are here today. Thank you for joining us in celebration of 10 year of service!