

# THE SAFE WAY OF HAVING FUN



Photos by Todd Linder / Skagit Valley Herald

The dance group MV Locas performs Friday at the Kulshan Family Festival at La Venture Middle School in Mount Vernon.

## Events like the Kulshan Family Festival on Friday have helped lower crime in the neighborhood

By MARGARET FRIEDENAUER  
Staff Writer

MOUNT VERNON — It would take more than rain to keep the Kulshan community from having a good time.

Dozens of children and families gathered Friday afternoon under gray skies at the La Venture Middle School fields for a soccer tournament, dancing, food and other activities coordinated by several local social-service agencies active in the neighborhood.

Mount Vernon police officer Jon Gerondale is the neighborhood resource officer at the Kulshan Creek

Neighborhood Center and helped organize the Kulshan Family Festival.

Keeping the community — especially neighborhood children — active and meeting together goes a long way in maintaining a safe community, Gerondale said.

“They’re the ones that are making the people committing crimes feel uncomfortable,” he said.

Gerondale is the second resource officer at the Kulshan Creek Community Station since it was established 10 years ago. While the neighborhood still has problems with crime and gang



Carlos Mendoza (left), 11, and Miguel Merino, 10, battle for the soccer ball during a pickup game Friday. The children attending the festival organized their own teams of four players to play in a tournament.

See KULSHAN, Page A6

# Kulshan: Day included soccer tourney, painting rocks and making bird feeders

Continued from Page A1

activity, Gerondale said police calls there have dropped significantly in the past decade as the community has become more resolute and outspoken about crime.

Skagit County Youth and Family Services, Skagit Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services, Mount Baker Planned Parenthood, and the Mount Vernon Boys & Girls Club sponsored Friday's event along with the neighborhood station.

The idea, Gerondale said, came up a few months ago at the agencies' monthly meeting. He said the agencies are always brainstorming for events to add to the list of ongoing activities in the neighborhood, which include monthly soccer tournaments, organized neighborhood cleanups, helping maintain the nearby Kulshan Creek trail and covering graffiti on trail bridges.

All the activity and involvement helps the neighborhood "police itself," Gerondale said. While he is the officer dedicated solely to the area for eight hours a day, five days a week, a cohesive community can help deter crime at all times, he said.

Friday's event drew more than just participants. It also drew neighborhood volunteers who helped run the event, like

Xtreme Latinas, a local dance group that performed.

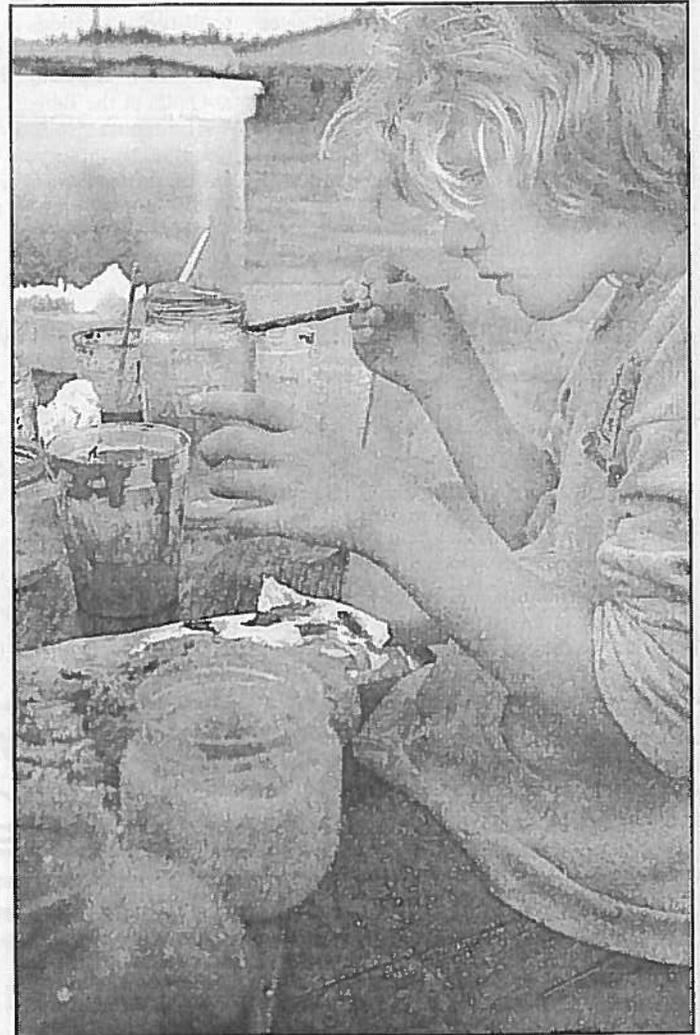
Food was provided by a local church group. Volunteers with the Skagit Valley Backyard Wildlife Habitat Team taught children to make bird feeders using pine cones, peanut butter and birdseed. Next spring, the organization hopes to help establish a butterfly garden at the neighborhood station, near the community garden.

While it drizzled on and off on Friday, most kids hardly noticed the rain as they warmed up for the soccer tournament, painted rocks and vases, made bird feeders or jumped in a giant inflatable bouncy structure.

Ali Skjei with Mount Baker Planned Parenthood had a queue of kids in front of her as she offered to spray streaks of color in their hair. Many of the kids knew the adults and especially "Officer Jon," as Gerondale is called at the Kulshan Station. It is part of the atmosphere Gerondale, the agencies and the community are trying to foster.

"This is positive for the kids," Skjei said. "The kids definitely have a place to go and people to trust with the focus of the neighborhood in mind."

■ Margaret Friedenauer can be reached at 360-416-2146 or [mfriedenauer@skagitvalleyherald.com](mailto:mfriedenauer@skagitvalleyherald.com).



Todd Linder / Skagit Valley Herald

**Chyanne Henry, 10, of Mount Vernon** paints a jar Friday at the Kulshan Family Festival at La Venture Middle School in Mount Vernon.