

Mount Vernon schools reopen Kulshan Creek Station



Jesus Perez-Linares and Lilia Ocampo run the student programs at the recently reopened Kulshan Creek Station, located behind LaVenture Middle School in Mount Vernon. Scott Terrell / Skagit Valley Herald

MOUNT VERNON — Some know it as the Casa Azul, some as the blue house, and some as the Kulshan Creek Station.

Lilia Ocampo knows it as the place where her parents learned to speak English and the place where she got homework help growing up. Today, Ocampo knows the blue portable on the corner of Kulshan Avenue and North 26th Street behind LaVenture Middle School as her office.

"I just want to be able to give back to the community some of what I got," Ocampo said. Ocampo is one of two instructors hired by the district to renew the station's tutoring program, which has been dormant for years, said Madison Elementary School Principal Evelyn Morse.

In October, Morse said, the district decided to renew the tutoring program at the station after talking to families in the district about what they'd like to see. They celebrated the program's reopening on Jan. 6.

"The idea was to help out students in the neighborhood," said Jesus Perez-Linares, the station's other instructor. "To encourage them to do something positive with their time."

Between 5 and 7 p.m. Monday through Thursday, students and their parents are welcome to drop by the station and get help with homework, hang out or have a place to use the Internet.

"One of the nice things about Kulshan Station is sometime, even if you're capable of doing the work, sometimes you just need a venue to do that," LaVenture Middle School Principal Dave Riddle said.

With the district strengthening its role at the station, it also came and cleaned it up a bit and installed more computers and technology, which both parents and students can use. Parents, especially ones who may not have access to a computer or the Internet otherwise, can come and check their students' grades or email teachers.

Perez-Linares said he hopes the tutoring program will evolve and be able to hold special events, like a dinosaur night or a whale presentation.

"We want to create an atmosphere where the students are happy to come," he said.

Overall, Perez-Linares said, he wants to be able to serve kids and help them get their daily 20 minutes of reading.

Since the station opened in 1998, neighborhood crime has been reduced significantly, said officer Jon Gerondale, who has been the neighborhood resource officer since 2003. Other organizations, including Community Action and Skagit Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Services, also utilize the building.

"It's a place where folks know they can go and it's safe and they can have whatever questions answered that they need," Gerondale said.

The school district hopes the station will continue to be utilized. It is open to anyone in the community, regardless of neighborhood and school attendance. If all goes well, the district wants to launch similar community projects.

"We're constantly trying to find ways that we can meet the needs of the people that we're here to serve: our communities and their families," said Dan Berard, director of categorical programs and assessment. "Ultimately, if this proves successful, we'd like to replicate it in other neighborhoods around town."

Kulshan Creek Station is also one of the pickup spots for the Kulshan Youth Program, which takes kids on free field trips to public lands where they can watch eagles, plant trees or stay overnight at the mountain school.

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