

USD Spanish Club observes Day of the Dead

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For the second half of October, a pair of skeletons was on display in I.D. Weeks Library, but they didn't have anything to do with Halloween.

Instead, they were part of an altar placed there by the campus Spanish Club in honor of the Day of the Dead – or el Día de los Muertos – which takes place on Nov. 1-2 each year.

"It's a holiday celebrated throughout Mexico and around the world in other cultures," explained Spanish Club director Deborah Van Damme during a presentation Thursday,

Nov. 1. "The holiday focuses on gatherings of family and friends to pray for and remember (those) who have died."

The yearly holiday is observed in connection with the Catholic holidays of All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day.

"Traditions connected with the holiday include building private altars honoring the deceased using sugar skulls, marigolds and the favorite foods and beverages of the departed, and visiting graves and offering gifts," Van Damme said. "They also leave possessions of the deceased."

The altar at I.D. Weeks honored Mexican

painter Frida Kahlo, who was born in 1907 and died in 1954.

"Her work has been celebrated in Mexico as emblematic of national and indigenous traditions, and by feminists for its uncompromising depiction of female experience and form," said Spanish Club president Laren Bennett.

Primarily known for her self-portraits, Kahlo's work has been described as containing elements of folk art and surrealism, with cultural traditions playing a large role, as well, Bennett said.

Although the Spanish Club has placed shrines on campus in the past – most often in the

Spanish Lab in Slagle Hall – this was the first time it was set up in the library.

"It was actually Lauren's idea, and we got a lot of acknowledgement from it," Van Damme said. "There are so many students and come and go here. A lot of people get to see it and appreciate it."

"There's more exposure here than in Slagle Hall," Bennett added.

Among the items on display were a picture of Kahlo, some books and a small clay box used for storing personal articles.

"We also have a little Mexican cart with oxen and fruit. She loved fruit," Van Damme said.

"We have a clay figure of a nun with a sombrero, and that represents the importance of Catholicism in the Mexican tradition."

"And of course, her dresses were very traditional. She believed in the traditional clothes of her country," Van Damme said.

These traditional clothes were worn by a pair of full-size skeletons.

"I've created altars in academic institutions in Texas and Colorado, and when I was looking for life-size skeletons – that's what I usually use, either real or plastic – no one could lend me their skeletons," Van Damme said.

"Finally I went downtown, and Diane

Nesselhuf of the store Sharing the Dream lent me her only two mannequins."

Although the Day of the Dead is celebrated primarily in Mexico, similar celebrations take place each year throughout the world, including countries in South America, Africa, Europe and Asia.

"Scholars trace the origins of the modern Mexican holiday to indigenous observances dating back hundreds of years, and to an Aztec festival dedicated to the goddess Mictecacihuatl," Van Damme said.

The Spanish Club's altar was on display in the library through the afternoon of Friday, Nov. 2.

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SDSU Extension approved for grant

Rural Development South Dakota State Director Elsie Meeks announced that USDA Rural Development approved a Rural Business Opportunity Grant of \$50,000 for South Dakota State University (SDSU) Extension, Brookings.

Rural Development funds will be used to build capacity in South Dakota's local food system through the establishment of an online Local Foods Center which will create structured connections between local growers and resource providers.

Today's announcement coincides with the annual South Dakota Local Foods Conference that is sponsored by the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and USDA Rural Development.

"This project provides the opportunity to bring their product to local communities and support economic growth in rural areas. It has been a USDA-wide focus to provide resources and support to American farmers and ranchers," said Meeks. "The Obama Administration is

committed to improving the lives of rural Americans, put people back to work and build thriving economies in rural communities. Supporting local and regional food systems provides an economic boost to rural communities in South Dakota."

"The online center will allow resource providers across the state to supply a collection of educational materials, including podcasts, learning modules, factsheets, and guides related to local food entrepreneurship, processing and production," said Chris Zdorovtsov, Community Development Field Specialist for SDSU Extension. Additionally, this grant will fund

assistance to form one regional local food collaborative group.

In 2009, USDA created the Know Your Farmer Know Your Food initiative to start the understanding of where food comes from and how it gets to the table. By increasing the capacity of local food producers through the online center, the health and vitality of the state is benefited.

For additional information on Rural Development projects, please visit <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/RDSuccessStories.html>.



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