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Students from a Latino leadership program and instructors from Teton Science Schools snowshoe to Phelps Lake on April 7 in Grand Teton National Park.

# Livin' la vida *al aire libre*

Latino teens get a taste of the outdoors life in Grand Teton National Park.

By Kelsey Dayton

Seeing the Tetons is nothing for Getsemani Barrios, 15. Every day she sees the mountain range, so there never seemed a reason to actually venture into Grand Teton National Park. But when she heard about a chance to learn to hike and have a few adventures, she signed up.

Last week Barrios and several other Latino high school students headed into the park, spending part of their spring break learning about activities, the outdoors and the management of Grand Teton National Park.

The Pura Vida program is a Latino leadership program aiming to introduce an underserved population to the park, said Betsy Moyer, field education teacher with Teton Science Schools.

The program aimed to teach students about the basic history of the area and help them develop outdoor skills like hiking and map reading. It included leadership training as students traded off doing jobs, like documenting the trips with photographs, or leading the group on the trail. One person was even tasked with reminding the group to hydrate while hiking.

The program was funded

by an America's Best Idea grant through the National Park Foundation. The Grand Teton National Park Foundation matched the grant, said Jackie Skaggs, Grand Teton spokeswoman.

The goal of the program was to try to draw a new audience to the park, Skaggs said. Park staffer want Grand Teton to be a welcoming place, she said.

Teton Science School staff worked with the park to introduce middle school and high school students to the park's appeal.

The goal is for the students to become ambassadors of the park for their family and friends, Moyer said.

For one week, six middle school students went through the program. The following week, seven high schoolers ventured into the park.

There will be additional programs in June and August.

Activities included a Wildlife Expeditions tour, hiking and learning about the plants and animals outside. But part of the program also involved introducing the students to park personnel, explaining jobs in the park and the role of rangers, making running into uniformed park folks less intimidating.

It also was an effort to en-



Pedro Melendez jumps at the chance to guess Alin Badillo's name before she can guess his during a name game to help one another get acquainted.



Marlan Nav gets some assistance applying her sunscreen before the group heads out on the trail.

courage students to consider careers in the National Park Service, Skaggs said.

"Who knows what sparks

we may have ignited," she said.

The students took in the activities eagerly, charging ahead on their hike April 7 in their snowshoes and scanning the area for animals.

It was a week of firsts for some, like Erick Ortiz, 16.

Ortiz has lived in Jackson about a year. He had never been into Grand Teton, nor had he been on snowshoes. He entered the park for the first time April 5 and on April 7 strapped on snowshoes for a hike to Phelps Lake. Ortiz loves to learn about his surroundings, he said. He wanted to know as much as possible about Jackson and the parks.

Directions were given in both Spanish and English.

Ortiz is still not super com-

fortable in speaking English so having staff and other students who spoke Spanish around him helped him take in all the information he learned in the week.

Barrios hadn't been on snowshoes before either. She found it exhausting, as the students eagerly charged ahead in the snow, but fun.

Barrios didn't know about the organization of park staff and hadn't been in the visitors center before the program.

She liked each activity, especially the games the group played to learn about one another and the ecosystem.

She plans to bring her family back to the park.

"It's something they aren't interested in," she said. "But they can try it."