

San Marcos DAILY RECORD

Making their Mark

By Jeff Walker
Features Editor

December 11, 2008 11:56 am

— San Marcos Mariachi Academy founder Frank DeLeon gives lessons regularly on virtually any instrument you put in front of him. But he teaches as much history as he does music.

There's the story he tells of Jose Alfredo Jimenez, a well known Mexican singer-songwriter who in his lifetime offered no interviews, telling his life story simply through music. His last known recorded song was "Gracias," in which he thanked the public for all of the affection they had shown in his life time, and that he carried their applause in his heart.

And by teaching the heritage of such Mexican Mariachis, he brings the notes to life for his students.

It seems to be working.

DeLeon's intermediate and advanced students, a group of 22 junior high and high school students, took third place over all at the annual Mariachi Vargas Extravaganza in San Antonio. It was the first time his academy had competed in the festival, which hosts Mariachi groups from Texas, New Mexico and Arizona.

"It's really awesome. The awards meant a lot to the kids and it meant a lot to me... It's amazing that they were able to compete on this level," DeLeon said.

DeLeon that most groups they against rehearse five days a week for one to two hours, as his kids meet only once a week for an hour-and-a-half. Their success, he says, is a tribute to the amount of effort parents and students have put forth in

"I'm teaching the kids passion more than anything else. They're learning Mariachi and music, but in the long run, they are learning to do something they love," DeLeon said. "Every minute we do have in rehearsal, we look at it as putting our heart into it."

DeLeon came by Mariachi rather naturally at a young age. He's the great-grandson of a Mariachi musician and guitar maker and the nephew of a guitar player. He began playing professionally at the age of 12 with older musicians.

"It played a big part in putting food on the table in my family," DeLeon said. "At age 12, I couldn't work at McDonald's, but I could grab my horn and go and play and bring in \$150 in a weekend."

The Mariachi Academy, established in the summer of 2004, specializes in the Mexican folk music genre (Mariachi) and caters to students of all ages and levels. Students are classified as beginner, intermediate or advanced, and can learn to play violin, trumpet, guitar or guitarron.

Current students range in age for 3 to 76, DeLeon said.

Adult guitar classes are currently held from 6 to 7 p.m. on Monday; an intermediate Mariachi class from 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday; beginning Mariachi from 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday; and advanced from 1 to 2:30 p.m. on Sundays. DeLeon teaches studio lessons throughout the week.

For more information call 353-2007.