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Culture Builds Community

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University of Dayton students gave children at local elementary schools a taste of cultural diversity as the children prepared for an ethnic music and dance performance later this month.

Students at five Dayton Public Neighborhood School Centers are participating in Cityfolk’s Culture Builds Community event "Soul Rhythms." The program brings visiting artists specializing in music and dance representative of Turkish, Mexican, African-American, Irish and Appalachian cultures to local schools to create dances with the students.

The elementary students and artists will perform individual acts as well as a collaborative work at 3 p.m. Sunday, April 22, at the Dayton Masonic Center, 525 W. Riverview Ave. Tickets are $12 general admission. For more information, visit the Cityfolk website (see related link).

To enhance the educational component of the program, Cityfolk turned to the University of Dayton Fitz Center for Leadership in Community. The Fitz Center enlisted University of Dayton sociology professor Stephanie Litka to develop a curriculum that would explore the various cultures featured in the dances.

"Not all of the students will be rehearsing the dances the entire time," Litka said. "We wanted to give them something that would reinforce what they were learning and make the most out of their time in the program."

With the assistance of Sinclair Community College Appalachian Outreach Coordinator Rana Peake, Litka created 25 lessons that included name sharing — an exercise in which students discussed the origin and meaning of their names — and language lessons, in which volunteers taught basic phrases from different languages to the students.

About a dozen University of Dayton students volunteered to help teach the lessons at the after-school rehearsals at the Neighborhood School Centers. Many of the final projects created in these educational sessions will be on display at the April 22 performance.

The Fitz Center for Leadership in Community strives to connect University of Dayton students and faculty with the Dayton community. It initiates partnerships that create both comprehensive community building and a context for connected learning and scholarship.

The Fitz Center was a partner with Dayton Public Schools to create the Neighborhood School Centers and regularly provides student volunteers to the schools. The five school centers emphasize the importance of education while building community and providing social service resources to residents within their neighborhoods.

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