

## The Scene.

Willamette University.

Summer 2008 Edition



## Cultivating Hope

**The shrubs and lawns at Colonia Libertad are meticulously manicured, the playgrounds covered with fresh bark mulch, and the basketball court well swept.**

By Sarah Evans

**Pictured above:** Jaime Arredondo '05 in front of the inspirational mural at Colonia Libertad

Right: Children at the Colonia Libertad playground

---

The cheerful golden siding on the apartment buildings and the multicolored concrete near the playgrounds conjure thoughts of sunny days, even in the persistent Oregon rain. The development's community center provides comfortable space for residents to take yoga, dance or aerobics classes and become conversant with computers. It's also a safe haven for children, a place where they can seek help on their schoolwork and play together under the watchful eye of older residents.

These sights greet you as you walk through the idyllic community in South Salem. But the crowning jewel is visible before you even enter the parking lot — a bright two-story

mural. Jaime Arredondo '05, who works for the corporation that owns the property, proudly shows the mural to everyone. The painting tells the stories of those who call Colonia Libertad home, and it tells Arredondo's story as well — one that leads from childhood heartache to unquenchable hope.

Colonia Libertad means “Freedom Colony” — an appropriate name for what the complex represents to the 48 families living there, families who make more than half their income from farmwork. These mostly Latino farmworkers come to the U.S. looking for well-paying jobs to break out of poverty, and they work tirelessly to pick or prepare the food we eat, tend the plants we place in our yards, and care for the forests that blanket western Oregon.

The Freedom Colony represents liberation from the farms where they spend their days, from the labor camps where many lived before, from a life of hopelessness, illiteracy, isolation and the belief that they have no worth.

“I started working with migrants because I wanted to honor my family's sacrifice. It's the least I can do for what they've done for me.”

Local artist Hector Hernandez created the mural with help from the development's young residents. The bottom half is black and white, representing the residents' past: workers bending over rows in the field, Aztec symbols for their original Latin American homes, and, most important, their hero César Chávez, civil rights activist and labor leader. The top bursts into full color with a view of their future: grinning children holding their arms high in hope, Mt. Hood in the background, Monarch butterflies — themselves migrants — flying freely.

Casual visitors might think the farmworkers have it easy. The pristine facility often fools the Willamette University students who volunteer there, until they remember the alternative for workers who aren't lucky enough to get an apartment (more than 200 families are on a waiting list).

“When I first went to Colonia Libertad, I was surprised to see how nice it was and how happy the kids were,” says Bekah Hykan '10, a student volunteer. “It's easy for me to forget that if the kids were living somewhere else, they would have a really hard life.”.....