

Multi-Cultural Brief



Charlottesville City Schools
Adult English as a Second Language Program
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Mission Statement

The *Multi-Cultural Brief* is an ESL newsletter created by students who want to improve their English and is produced as part of a newspaper class offered through the Charlottesville Adult Education program. Its purpose is to provide students with an opportunity to

- share their experiences of being from another country,
- offer multi-cultural perspectives on life in Charlottesville,
- help inform people who are new to Charlottesville of issues and opportunities around town,
- build a bridge of communication between the ESL population and Americans living in the Charlottesville community.

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A New Challenge

By Laura Cafagna

Finals Week is over. I can finally sit down and relax. It has been a very stressful semester! It all started two years ago when I decided that I needed a new challenge to improve my poor English. At that point I had already taken the TOEFL test, so I needed something more challenging.

My husband suggested taking the college placement test. At first, I thought it would be too hard for me, but then I decided to try. My original idea was to use the placement test to have an extra reason to practice my writing, reading and even my math skills. I started to study, and six months later I was ready to take the test. I didn't expect to pass the test, I just wanted to use it as an excuse to study.

The morning that I took the test I was very, very nervous. "Why am I doing this to myself?" I kept asking. I almost quit. I drove to Piedmont Virginia Community College, parked the car, and walked to the entrance. Then I panicked. I stood there frozen in front of the entrance with people bumping into me thinking, "I am going to fail." Then, since I do not like to quit, I pulled myself together, took a long breath and opened the door.

The smell of fries and melted cheese coming from the cafeteria hit me. I walked to the Learning Center – Room 626, I was told. I entered the room and asked for the placement test. They gave me the test and asked me to walk to the computer to take it. I sat down, took a long breath and told myself, "You want a challenge, here, now you have one." I started reading and really liked the article; it was a bit difficult, but I really liked the topic. I answered all the questions; then I took the writing test, and then the math test.

After two hours I was ready to go. I gave back the test and got ready to leave. The lady called me back.

"Don't you want to know your score?" she asked. "Did I pass the test?" I said. She looked at me as if I were from the moon. "Sure you did," she answered. "Now you need to see the counselor, and then you can start next week." I stood there with the test score in my hand. And repeated out loud. "Counselor, next week, me?"

"I sat down, took a long breath and told myself, 'You want a challenge, here, now you have one.' I started reading, and really liked the article, it was a bit difficult, but I really liked the topic."

I exited the Learning Center and walked in a trance to the Counselor's Office. I sat down in front of the counselor. She asked me, "How can I help you?" She saw my confusion and took the test score from my hands and said, "You do not have to take any ESL classes. What are your interests?" I woke up from a long dream and asked, "I passed the test and I do not have to take ESL classes?" I told myself, "You want a challenge. Here is the big one." I decided to take a writing class. I like to write, and she enrolled me in College Composition I.

The first day of class I was super, super nervous. I walked into the class, and I immediately realized that something was going to change in my life. All the students were American! I shook for two minutes until the first student approached me asked me my name. Of course, they immediately realized that I am not American. They liked it, and they started to ask me questions. After one minute, I relaxed and enjoyed myself. This was my first class. Then there was a second, then a third, and then many after that. Now I am half way to finishing my Associate Degree.

I like challenges, but when I took this one, I would not have imagined that it was going to be such an enriching, growing experience. I really encourage you to take college level classes. You get to meet many people and learn a lot. It can change your life.

For information on how to register for classes at Piedmont Virginia Community College, call 434-977-3900.

My ESL Classes

By Younghee Kim

I have been attending ESL Classes since last August. For two months after I came here, I just stayed at home. I couldn't go anywhere. I was alone. Only my husband was my speaking partner. I had no friends.

My husband tried to find an ESL class. At first, I couldn't find any classes because we didn't know the word "ESL". Also UVA didn't have any brochures with any classes. Finally, he found a class for beginners at Jefferson School. We went there but it was closed. My husband called the secretary, and she told us where to go. I was nervous, though, about going to a beginning class. I took a test after first class. I was surprised because the teacher told me I could go to the Low Intermediate class. When I went home, I shouted to my husband "Guess what! I can go to the Low Intermediate class," I said. But it was hard to decide which class would be better. I could understand in the beginning class. Besides, the class teacher was so kind and a good singer. I said to myself, "I will not understand at all in the Low Intermediate class. Maybe I will. What can I do if the teacher is strange?"

In the end, I decided to go to the Low Intermediate class. I couldn't understand some sentences the teacher said. But the class was very interesting to me. The teacher was so kind, too. She listened to students' speech carefully. I learned a lot of things as well as English. I learned about other cultures. I was especially glad to make friend with people from other countries. Some students and I met together twice a week and studied English. It was a great time. We could understand each other well because we had similar situations. I noticed I was not nervous when I spoke to ESL students. It made me comfortable. The class had students' own presentations. I gave a presentation about Korean comics. It was difficult to write my presentation, but

I was happy when I finished. After this class ended in January, I took another test. I was very surprised again because the teacher told me I could go to the High Intermediate.

During this winter term, I decided to stay in the Low Intermediate class. I learned a lot of about health care. It was very useful. I didn't know differences between the medical system of my country and that of the U.S. until then. The class had two student presentations. All presentations were great. I enjoyed making my poster about the book, *Letting Swift River Go*. It was the first time I had made my own poster. Also, I had never made a presentation before, even in Korea. I was not shy any more after I gave the second presentation. After this class I could go to the advanced class. Actually my English was not good, but I felt my English was getting better.

Last March something happened that had never happened before in my whole life. I came to win in Voices of Adult Learners Contest. I read my writing, "Squirrels and Acorns," in front of many people. I couldn't imagine I read something in English in front of so many people. I realized that different views of something are interesting to people.

I have taken four ESL classes. I feel each ESL class has a different atmosphere. Now I am taking two ESL classes. My evening class is fun. Most students have great smiles. I also take the Multi-Cultural Brief class because I want to share my story. As a matter of fact, it takes a long time to write something in English. Sometimes I have a little headache. If I didn't take any ESL classes, I may not know that pain. I am joyful to know this happy pain. I love ESL class, but sometimes I am very afraid

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"I read my writing, 'Squirrels and Acorns,' in front of many people. I couldn't imagine I read something in English in front of so many people. I realized that different views of something are interesting to people."

The Family Calendar

By Susana Contreras-Alcantara

I have lived all my life in Mexico City with my family. When I decided to get married to my husband, we moved to a small apartment; however, I visited my mother's house very frequently, and sometimes others of my family. I couldn't visit all members because the relationships changed with time and they were not near. However, every year my family has increased and the distances, too.

One year after I got married, I moved from Mexico City to Queretaro State. The distances increased more. I missed the frequent visits to my mother's house and the relationship with family. I called my mother by phone three or four times a month. Several times the conversation was the same. "Today is Mahetsi's birthday," she said. "Who's Mahetsi?" I asked. "She's Karen's daughter, your grandniece," she said. "Oh! I forgot!" I said. I felt awful! This situation happened several times and with different members of my family. I felt very disgusted with myself.

My husband told me, "This situation is normal because you have a big family." "That's right!" I said. However, I continued to feel worried about that; also, I couldn't even count the number of the members in my family. I have six brothers, five sisters, fourteen nieces, eleven nephews, five grandnieces, three grandnephews, and I needed to include my sisters' husbands and brothers' wives. The final count was approximately 54 members. Huff! I thought it would be impossible to remember all the birthdays, ages and names for the whole year.

In the middle of last year, my husband told me that we would move to Charlottesville. This increased my worries about my family. But last October I had an idea. All these problems had a solution. I needed to make my own family calendar. Great! Now, I needed to obtain all the information: full names, photos, ages, birthdays, phone numbers and addresses.

The biggest problem was when I decided this calendar would be a Christmas surprise for the whole family, because I needed to obtain all this information alone. I started and it was a hard work; the photos needed to be scanned, edited, and processed together with the other information into the special software to make a calendar.

"I remembered the day when I finished all the calendars, this day was Christmas morning, I felt great!"

In the middle of this work I decided to make another calendar for my in-laws. This family was easier than mine. There are only eight members. And of course, I needed to make one family calendar more for my husband with both families.

I remember the day when I finished all the calendars. This day was Christmas morning. I felt great! I hope all these calendars are useful for my families. For me, now it is easier to remember each birthday, name and age in my big family.

At the start of this year, I started calling to say "Happy Birthday!" and sending greetings cards! And I promise not to forget again anyone's birthday in my big family.

My ESL Classes

(Continued from page 4)

there that I am misunderstood because of my poor English. Also ESL class is very important to me because it is a unique social activity in the U.S. In my ESL classes, I have been praised more than I ever have been in my life before. When I feel my English is terrible, I will not lose courage if I remember that praise. I am very impressed with all ESL teachers. I think being an ESL teacher is a wonderful job. I want to be a good KSL (my creation word : Korean as a Second Language) Teacher when I go back to Korea.

Korea's Differences with the U.S.

By Jeh-Hong Lee

I'm going to explain several differences between Korea and the U.S. These are not artistic or political things but trivial things I have felt since I came here.

1. The spread of the internet.

There are internet computers in most families in Korea. I think the number of homes that have computers in Korea outnumbers that of America. Nowadays, most people set up the super highway internet in their home computer. Even the word "N generation," which stands for network, has risen. But I think every social facility in America, like schools and libraries, has an internet system, but there are not as many families who have internet services as those in Korea. In Korea, some serious problems are caused by the side effects of the internet, like anonymity, intruding into people's privacy and internet addiction. Many people in their 10s, 20s, and 30s in Korea spend time uselessly playing games or chatting in front of the computer. I'm not sure, but I think America doesn't have such serious side effects as our country.

2. Shoes.

Koreans are always in their houses without wearing shoes. It is unthinkable that someone visit any house while wearing their shoes. Nobody does that. But it's the opposite in the U.S. I felt very strange about that. When I first came here and set up the TV, the technician came into my house with shoes, and I was surprised. Afterwards, I came to know that is because Americans think it is impolite if they come in without shoes. But I am still not used to that.

3. Graves.

I see many graves near the towns in the U.S. And there stands just a gravestone on every tomb. But there are some differences in Korea. In Korea, when a person dies, people bury him in the mountain and make a small grave mound. Some graves of ancient

kings are like a small mountain. We still have the burial custom. The reason why people bury a dead person in the mountain is that people believe the mountain is close to heaven. Anyway, the graveyards in Korea are far from their living community, so people visit there only on special holidays. However, people in America can visit the graveyards whenever they want because they are near the town. Nowadays, the Korean government encourages people to burn the dead person to ashes because there are no spaces to bury dead persons.

"Korean are always in the their house without wearing shoes."

"It is very popular for us to go singing rooms or PC rooms."

4. Korean ages.

When someone asks me about my age, I answer it in different ways. Koreans count ages differently from other countries. When a child is born, she is already one year old because Koreans count the time we spent in our mother's womb. That time is almost a year. And everyone gets 1 age more on the first day of January. If a baby was born on the thirty-first day of December, she will be two years old on the next day. Therefore, a Korean who is same age was an American is counted 1 or 2 years older than the American.

5. Garbage separation.

When we dispose of waste, we should separate it in Korea. The categories consist of cans, paper, plastic, bottles and the residue of foods. And other waste has to be disposed of in a designated bag. That bag costs money. The government sells these bags to prevent waste from increasing. On the other hand, people don't care about that in U.S.* Of course it is more convenient, but I feel a little bit guilty because I have been trained in the Korean way. I think there may be some office that does garbage separation here. But if everyone does it, the U.S. can reduce the useless labor force and recycle many resources.

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My First Day in My English Class

By Susana Contreras-Alcantara

Last Wednesday was my first day in English class. I couldn't sleep the night before my class, because all night I thought about a lot of questions about my class.

The day that I decided to register I needed to take an assessment, and, when I finished, the person who did my assessment told me, "You are in the advanced class." I felt very surprised because I thought I would take the beginning class, and I thought this was the reason why I couldn't sleep.

I felt very nervous about my teacher and the others students. I thought and thought if my English was good or not!

The day of my class I was the first to arrived and waited for class to start. In the middle of the class, my nervousness was gone because I felt comfortable and happy.

All my classmates and my teacher were very kind and friendly. The name of my teacher is beautiful; it is Margie Sunflower Sargent, and this name is American Indian. In this class I met other people from Latin America: Maria Elena from Peru; Melva from Panama; Mercedes, Carolina and Jose from Mexico; and others from other countries, too. Now I feel very well in my class!

Korea's Differences with the U.S.

(Continued from page 6)

6. Tattoos.

I think the tattoo is not weird in America. When I go the grocery, I sometimes see a person who has a tattoo. But in Korea, tattoos symbolize a man who belongs to a gangster group, so people think he is a criminal. That person is discriminated against in such things as employment and social life. The man who has tattoo can't even apply for military service in Korea.

7. Entertainment.

Working is important, and getting rid of stress from work is also important. In Korea, there are more places where people can reduce stress. For example, it is very popular for us to go to singing rooms or PC rooms. Singing rooms have many rooms which are equipped with video monitors and melody machines and microphones, so we can feel as if we are on stage there. And PC rooms have many computers that are connected to each other by LAN. And they have many services which we can do together, so many friends usually go together and enjoy the games. These many

entertaining places have been expanded to the small village. But I can't find easily such places like that in U.S. I feel sorry about that.

8. Excuse me.

Korea is a small country but has many people. So they often get touched or bumped in crowded places. In addition, Koreans are accustomed to "touch culture" from childhood. For example, Koreans usually walk hand in hand or arm in arm, so they don't care about a little bumping. But in the U.S., when someone goes past another, they always say "Excuse me" even when they are just faced by each other. That seems to be very polite.

After I arrived here, I felt many different things. But I think a person from another country also feels strange about my culture. For making your own culture understood to them, first you should have an open mind and respect the variety.

***Editorial note:** Actually, recycling is very important in Charlottesville. Visit the McIntyre Road Recycling Center Monday through Friday 7:30 a.m. to 5:20 p.m., Saturday 8:00 a.m. to 5:20 p.m., or Sunday 12:30 p.m. to 5:20 p.m.

A Poem about the Sun

By Jeh-Hong Lee



The sun is everywhere.
She gives everybody a blessing.
She is shining with a great honor.
Her brightness is our will to live.

The sun is nowhere in night time.
He gives us just hot weather.
He is burning with big flames.
His blaze means our hardship.

Don't think seriously about that.
The sun is nothing but a sun.
We don't have to hide from him.
We don't have to be like Icarus.

Just walk on your own life.
Just find your little happiness.



Reading a Children's Book

By Hyen-Chan, Jeon

When I arrived in the U.S. last year, I was embarrassed that I couldn't listen to or speak to non-Koreans who

speak English. I didn't believe myself because I have studied English for 10 years and met some foreigners without trouble in my country. My reading and understanding of English did not have a lot problems there. But the situation here was different from my expectation. I couldn't hear or speak anything. People were never considerate of my English problem. I know there are many people who get high scores when testing for English skills and write long articles but have some problems speaking English. I thought, "What is the problem?"

"When I read, I know the words, but without the book I can not express my mind. So I wanted to memorize the sentences."

so we can get useful expressions automatically.

Also, I can understand what children like through a book. Thus, I can share and talk about our thoughts together with my children. It's wonderful not only learning English but also going through the book with my lovely children.

I thought If I could talk and explain my situation like a book I would never have any problems living in the U.S. And then I would read a novel that describes love, life and death. I look forward to a day when I can talk and discuss something about life with my international friends without any trouble expressing my mind and thoughts. It will be a great time for me to know all the people who live in the world.

Now I have been struggling and concentrating on listening and speaking. I have had many opportunities to do this. I can watch TV or videos and listen to the radio when I drive a car. Also, I can go to ESL classes and make some chances to talk with Americans. But the best thing I like is reading a book, especially children's books.

There are two reasons why I especially like children's books among the methods above. Good sentences that express a person's insides or deepest thoughts may be found in a novel. But while reading a children's book I found the reason why children's speaking is better than that of adults. Usually when I read, I know the words, but without the book I can not express my mind. So I wanted to memorize the sentences. But in a children's book, there are many simple sentences to express what happened, how to talk with friends, neighbors and adults. The contents of the books are the happenings and accidents of their lives. It's simple but difficult to say smoothly because we need lots of practice to be intimate. They repeat some sentences

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Why Use Two Last Names?

By Susana Contreras-Alcantara

In Mexico you use two last names. The first is your father's last name and second is your mother's last name. All your life you keep both last names. When you get married, you don't change your last names; you keep them. You can use the last name of your husband if you like at the end that your last name, but it isn't common.

If I decide to have a baby, my baby uses first the last name of my husband's father (his first last name) and the second is the first name of my father (my first last name).

When I arrived here in Charlottesville, I needed to add a dash to put together my last names. I needed to explain and sometimes show my certificate of marriage because I don't use the last name of my husband. But when I need to fill different official papers, I need more space because I put together both last names; also sometimes I don't have sufficient space for write my full name. The full names in my country are longer than here because sometimes people decide to have 2 or 3 first names plus both last names, and frequently they are very long.

I try to understand the changes here, because here it is common to only use one last name and when you get married, the women changes her last name and uses the husband's last name.* After all, you learn something new in your stay here when you know more people of different countries, because in each country is different the use the last names.

* **Editorial note:** In the U.S., women have a choice when they marry to either take their husband's name or keep their maiden name.



Traditional House

By Yan Yuan

I know there are advantages to living in a modern apartment, but I'd prefer to live in a traditional house. My reason is that I love traditional design. It's graceful, warm and inviting. I think modern design is very empty and sterile and not very inviting. So, because of the way it looks, I'd choose a traditional house.

I recognize the fact that a modern apartment is going to be in much better shape. Being new probably means all the plumbing works, the roof isn't going to leak, the windows are properly sealed, and the kitchen appliances are in working order. A traditional house can't guarantee any of that. In fact, it's likely that things will break down or need replacement, simply because of age.

Still, if the appliances are old, so is the wood, and that's a big advantage as far as I'm concerned. Very few new buildings have the kinds of wood that were used years ago. It's something that can't be copied.

Space is always important to me, too. I need a lot of room for my home office, my clothes, and to display all the knickknacks I've picked up in my travels. I also like to have interesting space. I don't want all the rooms and windows the same size or a boxy design. A modern apartment usually comes in one size and shape. A traditional house is going to have a variety of spaces where I can put a little table or a window seat. And it will have lots of room, from basement attic. These are all good reasons for me to prefer living in a traditional house.

Some people love modern design, but it's not for me. The space and beauty of a traditional home are more important to me than having everything new and perfect.

Field Trip to Greer School

By Kazue Matsumoto

I would like to write about the differences between the elementary school that I went to in Japan and Greer Elementary School in Charlottesville. Both are public schools, but they are very different from each other, although I might have to take 20 years' time difference into consideration.

I was impressed to see the classrooms which do not have doors, and which are much more colorful and full of many kinds of teaching items. I did not hear any sound of the bell that let the students know the beginning and the end of classes. I was surprised that the students are allowed to eat snacks in the classroom. Additionally, the students can wear clothes of their own tastes and bring any kind of backpacks. On the other hand, when I was a child, all students had to wear uniforms and use the same backpacks.

However, the biggest surprise was the size of each class. I had a chance to talk with one of the teachers, and she said, "I'm in charge of 24 children this year; it's too many." I told her that the average class size in Japan is more than 40 students per one teacher. And one of our newsletter classmates who came from China said that there are around 60 students in China.

At Greer School, there are "home classes." However, the students have to move from one classroom to another when one subject

ends according to their academic levels. In each classroom the teacher might divide the students into 2 or 3 groups according to each student's level. The teacher can have an assistant teacher so that they can take care of each student's needs. It seemed that all students could learn at their own speed. I thought it's an ideal way to teach and wondered why we can't do this in Japan.

"The teacher can have an assistant teacher so that they can take care of each student's needs."

And then I found that all teachers I saw in the school that day were women. It seemed strange for me because there are many male teachers in Japan. I asked about it to one of the teachers, and she said that they have two male teachers at Greer; however, many teachers go into administration where they can make more money to support a family. The U.S. government should think about education and pay teachers more.

Here is a big problem. The Japanese government might have to cut the salary for public school teachers to make the class size small. Additionally, there is another reason why the Japanese have avoided dividing students according to their academic levels. It is because of our own culture. Japanese society has expected the people to be the same as others.

I think we should try to change our education system. If I were a child, I would prefer the American way of teaching and learning.

Who Is a Very Important Friend for You? Why?

By Susana Contreras-Alcantara

In my childhood, I had different imaginary friends: dolls, toys, stuffed animals, but of all, the best was "Toby." We talked, slept, hugged, cried, and smiled together.

In elementary school, high school, university, and in the different places I worked I made several best friends and continue to stay in contact with them. When I arrived in Charlottesville, I felt happy because I knew I have a lot friends.

For several years – more exactly, 17 years – one friend of mine was my dog, "Susanito". All his life

he stayed with me. Both of us enjoyed our life together.

"In the moment when I need them or they need me, I find them or they find me."

I think I am fortunate, because I have a lot of friends. I like to meet people and I open my heart and when time

passes, you can feel they are your friends. Maybe, I can't see my friends frequently, but in the moment when I need them or they need me, I find them or they find me.

All the time, I consider my first friend and still my friend, is my mother. Together we're many things; we feel happy, sad, confident, trust in each other, etc.

Actually, all my friends are different and each is special, and they have a little part of my heart. But in this moment I always remember one, my best, best, friend!

When I met him, it was very easy to trust in him, because he is transparent! Always he is sincere, and you can talk very comfortably, and he doesn't care which topic you choose. I can talk with him and I don't feel fear or shame. He listens patiently.

Sometimes, when I feel sad, I don't need to say anything; he knows me and makes me feel better. He never lets me down! If I feel happy, he shares that happiness with me. We enjoy ourselves together.

He never is busy; he always gives me his hand, respects me and advises me all the time. He stays with me all the time.

The majority of people who know him as my husband; however, for me he has been my best friend since the day I met him.



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www.charlottesville-esl.org



Wind Towers and the Environment

By Xiaomei Zhu

Last night, our friend invited our family to take part in a trip to West Virginia. It was about wind energy and the environment in school. They meet 3 times a year. I had learned about many energy resources, such as oil, coal, and gas. I also had heard about wind energy. But I had not seen the wind tower with my own eyes.

It was my first visit to West Virginia. WV is a mountainous area. We drove for three and a half hours up and down the roads. We often drove in the middle of clouds. Big fog surrounded us. We could not see the road properly. When we were in valleys, we could see the clouds like fluttering ribbons on the mountainside. We arrived at a small cabin with the help of a map. Several cars were already parked there. We went into a dining room. It was dark. Several people were sitting around a long table. A desk clerk came toward us and led us to a bedroom. He took a lighter from his pocket and lit gas lamp. We found that they used gaslight instead of electricity. My son said, "We can not stay here. It's too dirty. We must go back." We had no choice. We went to bed with our clothes on. One person slept in their tent.

Next morning, a motorcade drove us to the first site. It was a wind tower plant. Forty-two wind towers lined the tops of the mountains. The second place

was a building site. The government plans to build many new wind towers on a narrow strip of mountains. The third place was a very beautiful farm. The new wind towers will be built in front of the farm house.

The people discussed the advantages and the disadvantages of wind energy. Wind-energy system operations do not generate air pollution or waste water and do not produce hazardous waste. No do they deplete natural resources, such as oil, coal or gas or cause environmental damage through resource extraction and transportation. The wind's pollution-free electricity can help reduce environmental damage by power generation in the U.S and worldwide. Wind power plants, however, have some local environmental impacts. Birds and bats occasionally collide with wind turbines. The degree of loss of birds and bats so far has been incalculable. The amount of birds will be gradually reduced. The tall wind tower will affect the natural scenery. And another problem is the wind tower's price. It is twice as expensive as coal.

I do not know which is right. But I think it is true the environment has gotten gradually worse. If we don't take effective measures, the earth will not support human life. This would be a terrible thing for all of us.



Calendar News



- July 7: **Summer Term begins.** There is no **tuition fee for summer term.** For schedule and **information call 434-245-2817.**
- August 1: **Summer Term ends.**
- Sunday Salsa: **Charlottesville Salsa Club** (www.cvillesalsaclub.com) sponsors a weekly opportunity to learn and practice Salsa and other dances in a smoke-free nightclub atmosphere. **Special: Advanced Salsa Workshops by Edwin Roa 6:45-7:45, \$10.**

Then Edwin will give a beginner's salsa lesson at 8. Edwin gives a very energetic group session that gives you a cardiovascular workout too! His lesson is included with the regular admission fee. DJ's music begins after the lessons and is 85% salsa mixed with other Latin styles. Complimentary water and sodas. The Outback Lodge, 917 Preston Ave. 8-12:00 p.m. \$5.00 (members \$3.00). 979-7211. Sundaysalsa@cvillesalsaclub.com.

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