

Online magazine reaches young Latinas

By María Cortés González / El Paso Times

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Publications targeting Hispanic teen girls, whether in print or online, are only a handful in a country with more than 40 million Hispanics.

But Google the topic, and you will find Latinasmagazine.org at the top of the list. The online magazine -- read by more than 30,000 youths a month -- was launched in 2002 by two University of Texas at Austin graduates: Laura Donnelly, based in Austin, and Alicia Rascon of El Paso.

The success of the magazine has been such that the nonprofit organization launched a print version of the magazine this spring and has launched a new social network, www.MyLatinitas.com, which is much like Facebook, but is geared to Hispanic girls.

"We've won some awards and national recognition, but what really inspires me is to meet young girls and learn how we've made a positive impact in their lives," said Rascon, co-founder.

Among the success stories Rascon has heard was one about a teen girl who went from contemplating dropping out of high school to turning her life around and earning a scholarship to UT-Austin; she is now inspiring other young girls.

Rascon said empowering Hispanic girls through media and technology has been the primary goal since she and Donnelly launched the magazine as part of a college project.

The women decided to print an issue this year, so that girls who do not have access to the Internet could have a version to show their parents. About 30,000 magazines were distributed throughout Central Texas and in El Paso.

The online magazine is updated monthly by the 15th, with content by girls and for girls on a variety of topics including events, culture, entertainment and life issues. It also includes poetry, essays and commentary.

"This is a forum where girls can express themselves, share their opinions and get advice from other girls," she said.

From the start, Donnelly said, she has been impressed by the kinds of topics girls want to tackle.

"The girls really have control of content and it's really interesting what they want to write about . . . it's less likely to be something about hair and more about important, first-person accounts of real life issues, like aspiring to go to college and the challenges that go with that."

The new social network is safe and is moderated constantly, Rascon said. So far, about 250 girls regularly contribute, but a couple thousand have surfed the site.

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"Latina girls, 13 and up, can join and create their own Web page, upload videos and blog regularly. They can also find out about upcoming events," she said.

Rascon said they hope to be able to publish another print issue by the end of the year.

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About Latinitas

Latinitas (www.latinitasmagazine.org) is a nonprofit dedicated to the advancement and empowerment of Latina youth through media and technology. It also publishes TeenLatinitas.com, the first digital magazine for U.S. Latina teens, and hosts MyLatinitas.com, an online community by and for young Latinas. It also hosts media-enrichment programs, in which Hispanic girls learn how to express themselves creatively and build self-confidence through media.

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