

Sunday/Style

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January 22, 2012
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THE SUN, LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS



By Debbie Hovanasian
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LOWELL — Chili and football? A classic combination. Chili and art? Not so much.

Eileen Byrne, executive director of Lowell's Brush Art Gallery, intends to change that. The 30-year-old gallery

will host its inaugural chili contest from 2 to 4 p.m. Saturday and hopes it will become an annual event. All are welcome.

Byrne was inspired by a chili contest she attended in the Berkshires that was held in a tent and featured "40 chili makers, both amateurs and professionals. It was great and I loved the set-up," she said.

Brush Art organizers hope that in this winter season of football mania and comfort foods, their own chili contest becomes an "annual prelude to the Super Bowl," said Nancy Wormwood of Lowell, board member and associate artist.

"We're starting small, then we'll make it really big," Byrne said. The contest will feature 14 crock pots full of piping hot chili donated by seven amateurs who are passionate about their sought-after chili recipes.

"In the future, we hope to have professionals as well, building a partnership between nonprofits and for-profit businesses," Byrne said. "It builds the audience and it's good to collaborate."

Though the gallery plans to start small, its goals are big, aiming to make a difference to developmentally-challenged adults in Lowell's RARA — Retarded, Active, Resilient Adults program. Proceeds from the \$5 admission fee, which allows seven sample cups of chili, as well as voting for one's favorite, will be directed toward free art lessons at RARA.

"There's no reason why art can't be both beautiful and beneficial at the same time," Byrne said.

As part of the gallery's new Special Perspectives Art Program, the lessons began yesterday under the tutelage of veteran Lowell public schools art teacher Lolita Demers, also a resident artist at the Brush. Demers kicked off Special Perspectives with a lesson on painting and stenciling on wood, including birdhouses, serving trays and a rocking horse.

"I just want to bring a smile to their faces," said Demers, whose future plans with RARA include fused glass, quilts and floral

Bring on the heat



Top photo, from left, Brush Art Gallery director Eileen Byrne of Lowell, resident artist Lolita Demers of Methuen, board member and associate artist Nancy Wormwood of Lowell with "Nancy's Dynamite Chili" (above and at right), and photographer and artist member Norm Caron of Lowell, preview the first benefit chili cookoff.

SUN PHOTOS BY JULIA MALAKIE

arrangements. "I'm hopeful that this will be fun, but also a learning experience for them."

The chili contest has another goal beyond providing a fun sampling of chili and helping RARA. The Brush also plans to shine the spotlight on Appleton Mills, Byrne said.

"The walls of the gallery will feature the artwork of 19 artists from Appleton Mills, so we'll have the oldest gallery hosting the newest," she said.

The art gallery reception, which takes place in conjunction with the chili contest, is also open to the public.

According to Wormwood, who organizes the Brush Art



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that lots of people

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chili. It's made by seven people

putting their all into it."

Brush Art Gallery and Studios, 256 Market St., Lowell; www.thebrush.org for directions (do not use GPS). Email Eileen Byrne at director@thebrush.org.

Brush Gallery hosts chili contest & to promote art & help others

receptions every six weeks with co-chair Martha Mayo, "our receptions are always fun. It's such a social atmosphere where I meet the most wonderful people from all walks of life. We have people who come back reception after reception after reception."

Beverages and hors d'oeuvres will be served inside the gallery while the chili contest is under way in the meeting room, Byrne said.

Among those planning to don an apron for the chili contest is Lowell's Norm Caron, photographer and artist member at the Brush. As far as chili contests go, he's not new to the game. He recently won the chili contest at his workplace.

Caron has been making his chili for 15 years, he said, adding that friends and family always ask that he bring the chili to gatherings.

"I started out following a basic recipe, then I started adding my own spices. I have a secret weapon that gives it more color," he explained. "I use ground beef, white and red kidney beans and I also use corn. But I don't spice it up too much. It has a sweetness with a little bit of kick."

Byrne, who is also one of the chili makers, will simmer a ham hock in her "Nancy's Dynamite Chili," also a favorite among family and friends for years.

Hosting guests at the gallery, Wormwood said, is "like hosting a party in our own home. They are our guests and we want them to feel comfortable."

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ESTHER CEPEDA

A Latino identity crisis

The Latino community is finding itself in a quandary about how

to reconcile a tremendously diverse collection of immigrants and multigenerational U.S.-born citizens who can fall anywhere on the socioeconomic map from dirt poor to super rich.

As if that weren't enough, three things have Latinos in even more of a tizzy these days: how they describe themselves to the U.S. Census Bureau, Mitt Romney's rise in the race to become the GOP presidential nominee, and a spate of Latino-centric media offerings.

Last week, a University of Southern California study found that 6 percent of respondents who reported Spanish or Latin American ancestry in a 2006 survey conducted by the U.S. Census answered "no" when asked if they identified themselves as Spanish, Hispanic or Latino.

The headlines that the news garnered, and the responses elicited from readers, ran from the sober notion that this is yet another sign of "ethnic attrition" or assimilation — aka, getting absorbed in the melting pot — to the fear that millions of Latinos are committing the unforgivable sin of "denying their own heritage."

Such responses perfectly delineate the divide between those who want Hispanics to become nothing more or less than a normal part of mainstream America and those who want to ensure that the Latino community remains a distinct segment when it comes to population counts — whether for the purpose of honoring their unique culture or to curry political favor or power. As it stands, Hispanics are folded into the three established racial groups: white, black, Asian.

In this context, it's no surprise that Latino voters, usually considered a reliably Democratic base, recoiled in horror to learn that Mitt Romney has Mexican ancestry and could become — gasp! — the nation's first Hispanic president.

Yes, Romney can make a claim to America's not-quite-sure-what-to-make-of-it Latino community because his father was born in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. At the end of the 19th century, the Romney family immigrated to Mexico in order to flee U.S. laws against polygamy, and it still has a presence there.

The collective Hispanic response to Romney's connection to the Aztec Empire has ranged from "But he's white!" to the ever-insulting "Yeah, right — who ever heard of a Mexican Republican?" — an accurate

reflection of the disconnect in Hispanics' view of the difference between race and ethnicity, and a clear exhibition of the idea that though Latinos might hail from any of 20 separate countries and be distinct in a million different ways, no "real" Hispanic would be a — double-gasp! — Republican.

In the past months there has been frustration over how Colombia was depicted in the action-thriller *Colombiana* about that region's drug cartel violence, the lack of Latinos celebrated at the Kennedy Center Honors, and a TV sitcom portrayal of Puerto Ricans as natural-born drug dealers.

Rob, a television show that debuted last week about a Caucasian goofball who marries into a Mexican family, made waves for both using reliable "close-knit Hispanic family" stereotypes to delight viewers and for getting Hispanics to question whether they should love or hate shows like this or *Modern Family*, with its stereotypical sexy Latina mom.

Truthfully, no lines in the sand need to be drawn — we can agree to disagree about our varied individual preferences and what they "mean." Latinos are diverse and complex, and we must accept this of our own community before we can expect others to do the same.

BOX OFFICE PREVIEW

It's 'Underworld' over all

By Paul Dergarabedian
For The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Sony's *Underworld: Awakening* should take a solid 3-D and IMAX enhanced bite out of the weekend box office with an opening domestic gross in the low-\$20 million range.

Kate Beckinsale, whose sheer beauty gave co-presenter Seth Rogen some apparent difficulty at last week's Golden Globes, reprises her role as vampire warrior Selene in the fourth installment of the popular *Underworld* franchise.

Fox's World War II drama *Red Tails*, starring Cuba Gooding Jr., Terence Howard and Bryan Cranston, dives into theaters on a collision course with a mid-teen debut. A personal labor of love by executive producer George Lucas, the film tells the true story of pilots in the all-black Tuskegee training program and their important contributions to the war effort.

Universal's *Contraband* opened with a bigger-than-expected \$24.3 million debut last weekend and should smuggle about \$14 million in its second go around.

The 9/11 drama *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* from Warner Bros. will have its first nationwide release this weekend as it expands from six to around 2,500 theaters and a likely gross in the \$10 million to \$12 million range. The film stars Tom Hanks, Sandra Bullock and newcomer Thomas Horn as a young boy trauma-



Kate Beckinsale in *Underworld: Awakening*

AP PHOTO

tized by the loss of his father in the World Trade Center attacks.

Disney's 1991 family favorite *Beauty and the Beast* was given a 3-D makeover and had a solid \$17.7 million re-release debut last weekend. Following up on the success of its *Lion King* 3-D reprise last September, Disney has clearly found the love in rekindling its animated classics and should enjoy a low-teen romance on *Beauty*'s second weekend.

Relativity Media's action-thriller *Haywire* kicks and punches its way into theaters this weekend, with an expected debut of under \$10 million. The R-rated Steven Soderbergh film stars newcomer and former mixed martial arts fighter Gina Carano, as well as Michael Fassbender, Ewan McGregor, Michael Douglas and Antonio Banderas.

Paul Dergarabedian is president of the Box Office Division of Hollywood.com and provides box office analysis for The Associated Press.