

ETCETERA

# Hispanic characters give cartoon new perspective

BY SUSAN PARROTT  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS — Baldo, the subject of a new nationally syndicated comic strip that debuts Monday, is like a lot of teen-agers: He longs to be noticed by the prettiest girl in school. He enjoys a good game of soccer. And he's building his very own car. He's also Latino. And the car he's piecing together is a low-rider. Cartoons depicting mostly Hispanic characters are rare. "There certainly has been a dearth of strips in that area. It is something we have been looking for, and when we saw Baldo, we knew it was the one," said Lee Salem, vice president and editor of Universal Press Syndicate, which is launching the strip in English and Spanish versions in nearly 100 newspapers.

Only three other Universal Press Syn-

dicate comics have started out with higher numbers, Salem said: "For Better or For Worse," "Calvin & Hobbes" and "The Boondocks."

The daily cartoon is written by Hector Cantu, an assistant features editor at *The Dallas Morning News*, and drawn by Carlos Castellanos, a free-lance artist from West Palm Beach, Fla.

Cantu said he had wanted to create a cartoon since he began reading *Mad* magazine as a child. He said he found little that resembled his own Mexican-American heritage in the cartoon books and comic pages.

Cantu knew Castellanos from his contributions to *Hispanic Business* magazine in Santa Barbara, Calif., where Cantu once worked. They have never met, but communicate by e-mail and telephone.

Baldo is about 14 and lives between the sometimes-conflicting influences of his U.S. home and Latin American heritage. The strip has a strong father figure, but no mother. "Having just one parent will help us focus on the relationship between father and son," Cantu said.

The female influence on Baldo comes from little sister Gracie, a strong-willed rebel who campaigns to save the Earth, and great aunt Tia Carmen, who forces Old World ways and magical remedies on the family. Baldo's father is just called Dad.

While the creators drew on some of their own life experiences to create the strip — Baldo's physical features were modeled after Castellanos' half brother — they say the strip's story lines about teen-age dilemmas and family interaction appeal to readers of all ethnicities.

# Florida commissioners set regulations on size, location of student housing

BY SCOTT MAXWELL  
COLLEGE PRESS EXCHANGE

ORLANDO, Fla. — Residents who dread the sounds of late-night college parties — and the early-morning aftermath — might be in for some relief.

Orange County commissioners clamped down Tuesday on the burgeoning student housing surrounding the University of Central Florida, just hours after UCF officials celebrated the groundbreaking of a new on-campus dormitory.

The new law will require future student apartments to be more than a football-field's length from any residential property. And they will cap the number of units in any complex at 750.

If such a law had been in place a few years ago, the massive Knights Crossing complex in eastern Orange County that has stirred up so much conflict would not exist. That complex has more than 2,500 students and abuts nearby homes in Orange and Seminole counties.

The commission's ruling was designed to give some solace to residents such as

Jerry Stewart, who told the board that he was stirred out of bed Tuesday morning.

"This morning at 3 a.m. I could hear some girl screaming her lungs out," Stewart said.

Commissioners were sympathetic, which is why they agreed to the 400-foot buffer between future complexes and homes.

Developers, brokers and landowners fought the proposal every step of the way. Many argued that the extra buffers will essentially prohibit building more of the needed off-campus housing.

One development attorney also contended that the county's new law could violate the nation's Fair Housing Act because it discriminates against students. County officials, however, said that wasn't true because students aren't protected under that law.

The 400-foot buffer was something of a compromise. Developers had argued against anything more than 250 feet, while residents lobbied for 1,000 feet.

"We have a problem here that has no perfect solution," said County Chairman

Mel Martinez.

One solution that all of the commissioners agreed upon, however, was that UCF should build more student housing on its sprawling 1,400-acre campus.

Less than 7 percent of the school's 32,000 students live on campus. And even though the school has plans to increase that to 15 percent by 2002, commissioners and residents want more. The national average of students living on campus is about 25 percent.

UCF officials have reminded angry neighbors and county leaders that the university generates thousands of jobs and tens of millions of dollars for the local economy.

The debate over UCF's role in providing housing is not over yet. A housing task force comprised of school officials, residents and developers is set to offer suggested changes to the new law this fall.

Commissioner Ted Edwards, whose district encompasses UCF, said he hopes the task force will find solutions, as opposed to the county's new law, which offers only restrictions.

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