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Actor Christi Cruz presented the one-person multimedia performance 'La Causa' during the lunch hour at Tacoma Community College on Wednesday. She is part of Seattle's Living Voices theatrical company. She told the story of the plight of farm workers by the late Cesar Chavez in the 1960s.

Show counts on effect of 'La Causa'

Educational group uses history to examine plight of migrant workers

BY AARON CORVIN
The News Tribune

You might find it difficult to imagine picking grapes in the scorching sun, picking everyday without a bathroom break, picking furiously to avoid being fired on the spot.

And that's why Seattle actor Christi Cruz imagined it for you Wednesday, breathing life into the lives of migrant farm workers in her one-person, multimedia performance of "La Causa" (Spanish for "The Cause") at Tacoma Community College.

Cruz urged an audience of about 50 students to think about how those fruits and vegetables make it onto the

shelves of shiny suburban supermarkets.

"They're planted and picked by men and women and sometimes children," she said.

Cruz spoke and acted the part of budding journalist Marta Hernandez, who grows up in a California migrant farm family in the 1960s. Interacting with TV images and using a microphone, Cruz illustrated the racism and poor working conditions suffered by Latin American farm workers. She also highlighted renowned labor activist Cesar Chavez's struggle to win better wages and health care for migrant farm workers.

As president of the United Farm

Workers of America, Chavez founded and led the first successful farm workers union in U.S. history. He shepherded a broad coalition of unions, religious groups, students, minorities and consumers in pursuit of social justice. Chavez died in April 1993 at age 66.

Before and after her 30-minute presentation, Cruz talked to students and fielded questions. Cruz, 29, is a member of Living Voices, a nonprofit educational theater organization. The group aims to demonstrate watershed moments in history using a combination of theatre and media. It prods people to examine their own values and face complex social issues.

The decade-old Living Voices has

traveled the country delivering performances to audiences ranging from college students to corporate employees. The presentations have taken on everything from the Holocaust to Japanese internment during World War II.

Cruz said the multimedia presentations work particularly well with some younger students who might otherwise be turned off by history.

The ultimate message of each presentation is simple, Cruz said.

"One person can make a difference."

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