

Festival provides setting for Hispanic celebration

By Doug Kerns
Staff Reporter

It was a day of color and fun followed by a night of rhythm and dance.

But more importantly, festival-goers said, Saturday's Hispanic Heritage Festival provided time for a community in the spotlight to come together with its neighbors to remember what is good.

"It allows me to celebrate who I am in the town I love. That's pretty cool," said festival-goer Pablo Rangel of Lincoln.

Following the death of Francisco Renteria last year, the Hispanic community suddenly found itself under the glare of media lights and the focus of public discussion. Renteria died Oct. 1 after a struggle with police.

This past year has been marked by court dates involving Lincoln police officers and a fire department captain. To some, the Hispanic community's public image has been defined by the tragic case.

Festival Chairman Eliot Rivas said the media focus on the Renteria case came at the expense of the Hispanic community as a whole. Dwelling on the year-old case detracts from the pro-active nature of the festival, he said.

The festival was held at the State Fair Agricultural Hall.

"The turnout was above what was expected," Rivas said, "from a wide variety of cultures."

The hall was filled with booths offering goods and services for a variety of needs—from flutes and rainsticks to intergenerational networking and family services.

Vendors preparing foods from many Latino cultures offered a delicious backdrop to the day's events, with foods from several nations including the Philippines, El Salvador, Chile, Venezuela and Mexico.

"The food is a big part of what it's all about," one satisfied festival patron said.

Several activities were aimed at the

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PABLO RANGEL

Festival-goer

younger people attending the festival. Kids were entertained by a musical puppet show and a pinata contest, fascinated by entomology Professor Ackland Jones' "Bugs and Butterflies" and delighted by friendly and fuzzy llamas.

A selection of work by Mario Bravio from the "Sense of Culture" exhibit in the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery was displayed, Rivas said, and showed an example of the power of Latino artistic creativity.

Many other activities marked the day, including the percussive artistry of Senegal master drummer Mane Badiane. The whirling, graceful talent of the Latino Contempo dancers, performances by Lincoln's Senior Zapatos Alegres and the Capital City Cloggers also entertained the crowd.

"It's an activity that you can only do once a year," said Molly Rangel of Lincoln. "And it means something. I wish we could do this every weekend."

The dance, which lasted until after midnight, began as the lights dimmed and the night heated up with the sweet, intoxicating Tex/Mex melodies of Lincoln's own Futura and the powerful percussion and striking horns of Kansas City's Mambo X.

The night was infused with an electric sparkle that packed the dance floor and drew the rhythm from everyone in the audience.

The two bands performed successive half-hour sets, sliding smoothly into romantic music for slow dancing, then pepping things up with a touch of salsa.



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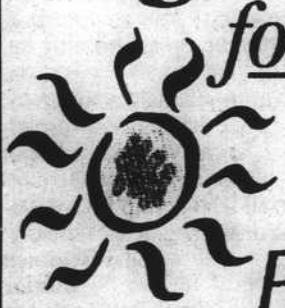
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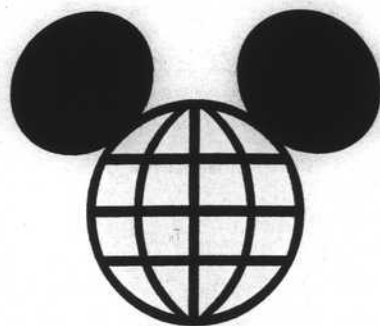
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