

# Festival celebrates Hispanic life

By LINDSAY YOUNG  
Staff Reporter



DANIEL LUEDERT/DN  
David Jacobo plays the guitar at the Hispanic Heritage Festival. Jacobo and fellow Kucitaki band members played during the festival Saturday and Sunday at State Fair Park.

Three girls and three boys walked out of the door cut open in the center of the large, sand-colored pyramid. The girls, with yellow ribbons tied in their brown braids, followed by the sombrero-clad boys, walked to the front of the stage.

These students of Sabor Mexicano, a Lincoln dance group, took their places. The Mexican music began, and their feet moved in synchronized steps.

Their dances represented a donkey, an angel and a bush. In one section, the boys danced with machetes.

This group of dances, called jalisco, was part of a much larger weekend celebration — the Hispanic Heritage Festival.

The festival at State Fair Park was arranged with specific goals in mind, said Joel Gajardo, director of the Hispanic Community Center, which sponsored the event.

The goals included sharing Hispanic culture and giving the Hispanic population a chance to rejoice in its own heritage, Gajardo said. The theme of the event was "Nuestro Idioma," or "Our Language."

The theme was demonstrated through more than 40 booths, food stations and entertainment which ranged from a jalapeno-eating contest to

cha-cha lessons.

Sara Stephenson, a Lincoln elementary school teacher, ran a booth for a friend in Guatemala.

Her friend helps groups of women in Guatemala market their handmade goods. Stephenson's booth sold handmade woven crafts and jewelry, some made in Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico and El Salvador.

Aside from crafts, many booths were there to educate and encourage festival visitors.

Latino Vote USA promoted voting in the Hispanic community.

Lori Lopez Urdiales, Latino Vote USA co-coordinator, said her group focused on getting more Latinos involved in everything from voting to running for a public office.

Iglesia Latina Berean, a Latino church, was hoping to recruit members. Having started only last year, the church hopes to increase membership, said Sonja Bice, a UNL junior Spanish major.

This festival, she said, was one way reaching out to prospective members.

The Lincoln City Libraries showed what was available to Spanish-speaking residents.

"Sarah Sencilla y Alta," or "Sarah Plain and Tall," was one of the many children's books on display that were translated into Spanish. Other resources available include opportunities to learn English and translated guides, maps and

magazines.

"People are real surprised at how much we actually have," Wood said.

The library was part of many booths aimed toward education and children.

Futurekids Computer Learning Center featured computers children could try. Gajardo said they chose computers because of the festival's focus on the culture and language.

"The language of the future is the language of computers," he said.

Other children's activities included marble painting and a booth promoting car safety sponsored by State Farm Insurance and the Lancaster Sheriff Explorer's Post No. 80.

Food seemed to be the most popular booth choice. More than 10 booths lured visitors with the smell of tacos, nachos, enchiladas, sopapillas and fried ice cream.

This combination of entertainment, education and food was enough to help Syracuse High School Spanish II students Nikki Harms and Roxanne Burns understand the culture for a class project.

"It showed me how intermixed the country is becoming," Harms said.

Stephenson agreed, saying the festival was a good way to acquaint the people of Lincoln with Hispanic culture.

"After all, we're a pretty small world," she said.

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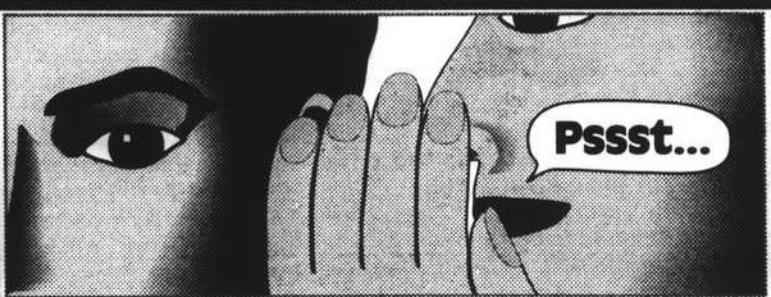
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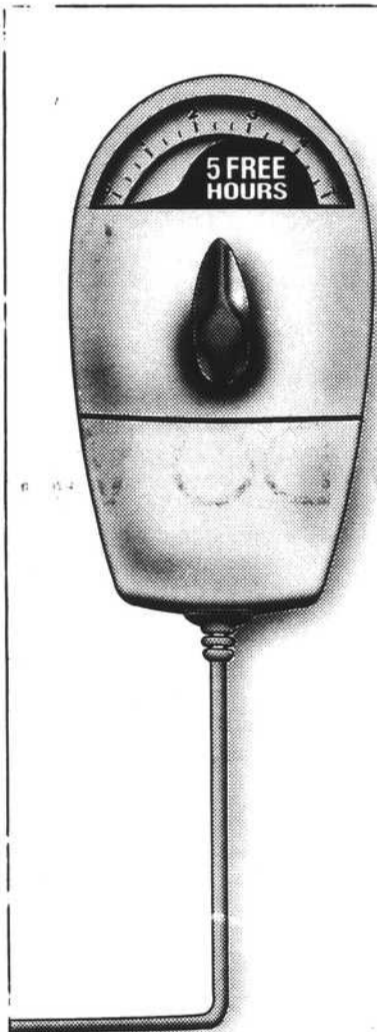


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