

Mexico beats Napoleon

*Cinco de Mayo gives pride and a cause for celebration to Chicanos living in the U.S.**

by Irene K. Hislop

Cinco de Mayo celebrates a battle won in 1862 in a struggle that continues today. In 1862, the Mexican government was in trouble. It was low on funds, and funding the military wasn't its top priority. President Benito Juarez was trying to improve the government, and faced a great deal of internal turmoil. Napoleon III, who ruled France at the time, decided to take advantage of Mexico's vulnerability.

Napoleon III sent an army of more than 6,000 men to Mexico with state-of-the-art weaponry. No doubt they thought Mexico an easy target. Wrong. Mexican General Ignacio Zaragoza met the French with an army of 2,000 men armed with slingshots and sticks, and little heavy artillery. They had a weapon the French hadn't counted on — pride. Mexico won.

While official invasions of Mexico are a thing of the past, Mexicans often face the same arrogance from Anglos that Zaragoza did in the Battle of Puebla.

"The victory itself is not as important as its moral significance," said Angie Sifuentez, organizer of Eugene's Fiesta Latina, a Cinco de Mayo celebration. "The French thought they could come in and take over because Mexico didn't really have an army."

"I think it relates to times right now because it relates to a victory of minority groups," explained Anne Sauvie, co-owner of La Tiendita, a Mexican grocery that doubles as a cultural hub for Eugene's Latino/a community. "It's a sense of empowerment. It shows the strength and determination of minorities."

That sense of empowerment can be especially important to Latinos living in the United States, where they face the subtle and not-so-subtle effects of racism. The news in recent months has contained a steady stream of examples of that racism, such as language barriers in the justice system, exploitation of farm workers, harassment from the Immigration and Naturalization Service, bigoted opposition to a housing project in Hillsboro for farm workers, and police stopping a disproportionate number of Latino drivers.

"There aren't many occasions Mexican Americans can identify with in the United States," said José González of Teatro Milagro/ Miracle Theater. "The roots of our culture are distant. The

main reason Mexican Americans celebrate Cinco de Mayo is, "What else do we have?"

Cinco de Mayo, according to some community leaders, seems to be more important to Mexican Americans than to Mexicans. González grew up in southern Texas, where he says, Cinco de Mayo was just the day after May fourth. When he moved farther from the U.S./ Mexico border, he was surprised to see how much the holiday meant to people.

"Cinco de Mayo isn't a big deal in Mexico," Sifuentez confirmed. "It's really a Chicano holiday. Chicanos took Cinco de Mayo on as a celebration of their background."

Fiesta Latina, the event Sifuentez organizes in Eugene, doesn't have a strictly Chicano/a emphasis.

"We call it [Fiesta Latina] because we want to be inclusive," she said. "We feel it's a celebration for all Latinos."

It's also one of the few Cinco de Mayo celebrations by Latino/as, according to González.

"A lot of Cinco de Mayo celebrations are not put on by Latino/as," he explained. "They are put on by Anglo capitalists to make a buck."

The Fiesta Latina will be on Saturday, May 8 at the covered basketball courts at First and Washington streets in Eugene. The event will feature a main stage, where Caliente and Sandunga will perform, as well as a children's stage. Puppets, piñatas, mimes, and Teatro Milagro will be on hand to entertain and educate. Storytellers will share Latino/a culture with tales told in both Spanish and English.

"It's fun to have food and music," commented Sifuentez, "but it's education as well."

Food from different regions will hold some surprises for those fiesta-goers expecting the more standard tacos and burritos. Local artists will also display their works.

Fiesta Latina is just one stop on Teatro Milagro's busy schedule. They will also perform *Earth Summit*, a play about three children who go to live in the Brazilian rainforest, in schools in Portland, Hillsboro, Salem, Woodburn and Canby.

One other point: Cinco de Mayo is not Mexican Independence Day, as so many non-Mexicans think. Mexican Independence Day is September 16.

is \$2 per show. For more information, call 244-0111.

Beware the Amazon Dragons

The Lesbian Community Project will be sponsoring an entry in the Rose Festival dragon boat races. The Amazon Dragons started team practice in early April. The race is scheduled for June 12-13. Teams are expected from as far away as Taiwan, Canada and Great Britain. This will be the second year Amazon Dragons have hit the Willamette for this event. The Amazons practice every Tues. and Fri. at 6:30 pm and Sunday at 10:00 am at the Willamette river. For more information, call 223-0071.

Irene K. Hislop

Video examines Israeli history

The Israeli Program Center of the Mittleman Jewish Community Center has begun screening a documentary on Israel's political history. The first two episodes were shown in late April, but three more are planned for May.

Israel: A Nation is Born is narrated by Abba Eban, Israel's former foreign minister. The videos examine the political challenges Israel has faced since the British Mandate. Oregon Public Broadcasting has reportedly declined to show the documentary, which has been praised by Jimmy Carter and Henry Kissinger.

The final three episodes will be shown at 8 pm, May 5, 12 and 19 at the Mittleman Jewish Community Center, 6651 SW Capitol Highway. Cost



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