

HERMISTON

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McKenzie Park, organizers shifted the focus of the Cinco de Mayo celebration four years ago to make it more multicultural, inviting people of all backgrounds to experience a taste of Mexican heritage. The event has grown each year in both participants and attendance.

This year, the parade doubled its participants, according to de la Cruz, as did the dancing horse — caballos bailadores — competition, where riders led horses to live music. A panel of judges evaluated the horses based on appearance, speed, fluency and skill of the rider. Sunday, Carlos Pinto, of Hermiston, took home the three-foot, first-place trophy in the dancing horse competition, but De la Cruz said the competition brings more than just entertainment because watching Mexican Charros and their dancing horses is a big event in Mexico.

"When I was a kid, we used to go watch it, the Charros," he said. "They would be dressed beautifully in their full costume with the hat and they would have their horses dance in front of the band. It is something I still remember."

For Cinco de Mayo, Hermiston's Latino community brings that experience to the next generation, children who may not have



STAFF PHOTOS BY JENNIFER COLTON

Above: Members of mariachi band Los Temerosos sing and play down Second Street during the Cinco de Mayo parade through downtown Hermiston.

Top right: Children throw candy from the back of a pickup in Sunday's Cinco de Mayo parade through downtown Hermiston.

Middle right: Riders wave to the crowd during Sunday's Cinco de Mayo parade through downtown Hermiston.

Lower Right: A mariachi band plays while horses — and their riders — compete in the caballo bailando competition Sunday in front of Hermiston City Hall.



set foot in Mexico.

"When you bring in an event like this, people start researching to see, 'What is Cindo de Mayo?'" de la Cruz said. "Now our children and our grandchildren can learn about their own culture. Now our neighbors can learn about our culture."

About 80 percent of Hermiston's Latino population hails from Mexico, de la Cruz said. In Mexico, the country's independence day — Sept. 16 — is a larger celebration, but in

the United States, Cinco de Mayo has taken hold as "the" holiday to celebrate latino cultures, similar to St. Patrick's Day or Oktoberfest celebrating Irish and German cultures.

Sen. Bill Hansel, R-Athens, served as the opening speaker for the event and recognized the growth of the Hispanic community in Umatilla County.

"When I was first elected to serve as a Umatilla County Commissioner in 1983, the largest non-white population was Native

Americans. Our county did not have many Hispanics who made this community their home," he said Sunday. "Now all that has changed."

Hansel highlighted the work ethic, faith and family focus of the Hispanics he has known in Umatilla County.

"Hispanics are community leaders," he said. "For our region's economy, I'm glad you're here."

Making the Cinco de Mayo celebration multi-cultural extends that focus out into the commu-

nity and into surrounding communities. Participants in the dancing horse competition came from as far as Yakima; mariachi bands traveled from Hood River to be part of Hermiston's celebration.

"Our goal it to make this an event people of all cultures can come to and enjoy," de la Cruz said. "This is a Latino culture event, but we want everyone to feel comfortable. We want to celebrate together — it doesn't matter what culture you come from."

BOARDMAN

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smaller than in past years due to falling on Mother's Day weekend, but it will still feature plenty of family-friendly fun.

"It should turn out to be a really nice celebration," Richards said.

A welcome and salute to the flags will kick things off at 4 p.m. A handful of live bands, which will be introduced by DJ Kora, will fill the air beginning at 5 p.m. and continue into the night.

A small carnival will offer people a chance to play games and win prizes. In addition, food will be plentiful with a number of vendors on hand serving up familiar Mexican fare as well as other food and drink items.

Richards said with a diverse community, the event helps in celebrating the heritage of Hispanic community members. It's important, she said, to welcome others and to honor their culture.

"We like to keep that tradition going," Richards said.

Sometimes erroneously referred to as Mexico's independence day, the date actually marks Mexico's 1862 victory over France at the Battle of Puebla. In the United States, Cinco de Mayo has evolved into a celebration of Mexican culture and heritage.

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