



the

Irving Rambler



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"The Newspaper Irving Reads"

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Cinco de Mayo celebration more than just a Mexican festival

By Jess Paniszczyn

The Irving Parks and Recreation Department presented Cinco de Mayo, a *Senter Park Neighborhood Festival*, on May 5. Complete with live entertainment, a health fair and a variety of activities, the free event invited all residents to participate.

"The Cinco de Mayo event was a tremendous success," Elvia Wallace-Martinez, director of DCET and event emcee, said. "Today instills pride in our culture. Celebrating the meaning of Cinco de Mayo is important. It is not just fajitas, drinks and fun. It is to honor the fact that indigenous people, Indians, from Mexico way back on May 5, 1862 defeated the French army with a lot of courage. They sent the French army back to Europe.

"The French were trying to settle in Mexico and conquer us. We already had Spaniards, the civil war and the Mexican war with the U.S.A. So we were oppressed and bankrupt. President Benito Juarez wanted to temporarily stop debt payments to England, Spain and France in order to recuperate economically. Only the French came to do battle. When the French came, the people led by Zaragoza officers won the battle.

"And today, we celebrate Cinco de Mayo. This event is a lot of fun. Diversity is shown through the groups that participate like Dana's Dance Academy, West Express Cheerleaders and mariachis. You see people you know. It is a whole multicultural festivity, more

than just a Mexican festivity," she said.

Community Programs Supervisor, Ray Cerda, oversaw the Cinco de Mayo event for many years at Lee Park and was instrumental in bringing the event to Senter Park for the first time.

"The Senter Park Cinco de Mayo celebration and health fair has over 120 health vendors, live entertainment and a children's area. We have always celebrated this event at Lee Park, but this year we moved it over. Senter Park offers a bigger venue and there are more people here. Outside there are mobile vehicles, one is offering basic dental services and another offers mammogram screen-

ings. We are very excited. There is a lot going on," Mr. Cerda said.

"During this event, people gain an awareness of the rich tradition of Cinco de Mayo through the food, entertainment, and arts and crafts. Diversity and variety is what our community is all about."

Additionally, the conflict between Mexico and France impacted American history. Fourteen months after the May 5th battle, the Union Army defeated the Confederates at the Battle of Gettysburg.

After the Civil War, U.S. forces rushed to the Texas-Mexico border under General Phil Sheridan to provide the Mexicans with all the weapons and ammunition they needed to expel the

French. American soldiers were discharged with their uniforms and rifles if they promised to join the Mexican Army to fight the French. Many American soldiers

joined the Mexican Army, and the American Legion of Honor marched in the Victory Parade in Mexico City.¹

¹Source: www.vivacincodemayo.org



Getting the party started, Andariego plays their unique style of music during the Cinco de Mayo celebration.



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