

Cinco de Mayo Festival: Mission District or Civic Center?

Cinco de Mayo festival experiences growing pains on its 25th Anniversary, as residents complain

By KLEYTON JONES
Staff Reporter

For 25 years the Mission has celebrated Cinco de Mayo with characteristic spectacle and enthusiasm, showing the pride of the community which lies at the heart of San Francisco's Latino community. But this year, the Mission celebrated Cinco de Mayo at Civic Center, where over 30,000 people from around the Bay Area attended.

There were grumblings in the loyal Mission crowd: "Why aren't we celebrating in our own neighborhood? How much business is the Mission losing? Why are we being charged three dollars to attend a holiday?"

Roberto Hernandez, the president of MECA (Mission Education and Cultural Association), the host of Cinco de Mayo for the past six years, says there was little choice but to hold the event at Civic Center this year, a location that seemed a trifle sterile to some.

"It was our 25th anniversary, and we wanted to do something big," Hernandez said, defending MECA's decision to use Civic Center. "All that most people know about this holiday is that they're going to come out and have a good time. They've got no idea of the thousands of details and staggering logistics that go into planning an event of this size."

"I also believe that as Latinos, we don't live in a reservation. We are no longer just a minority, we are part of the majority."

Gate sales: \$90,000

MECA treasurer Mitchell Salazar says the organization "did quite well" this year on the festival. This year's celebration cost roughly \$350,000 to put on, and MECA made about \$150,000 from the event, \$90,000 of that coming from admittance ticket sales. The balance was made up with grants, including \$30,000 from the city, according to vice President Pete Gallegos.

A portion of the funds raised were transferred to take up slack in Carnaval's budget shortfall for 1991 (another MECA project).

The former location of the festival, "La Raza Park" at the corner of 25th and Potrero, was too small for this year's festival, Hernandez explained.

Last year, a line two blocks long was turned away from the event because the grounds were filled up. As in previous years, local liquor stores did a booming business on the overflow crowd, and complaints from neighbors poured into the MECA headquarters after the event.

Last year, 216 people were arrested at Cinco de Mayo. This year, with alcohol consumption limited by long beer ticket lines, only 3 arrests were made.

Liquor stores lose out

"What do (liquor stores) do for the neighborhood?" an angry Hernandez asked. "They don't put anything back into the community!" These were the only businesses that significantly prospered around the festival grounds in previous years, he said.

The throngs that appeared this year to see the dancers, floats and Grand Marshal Linda Ronstadt provided roughly the same amount of business for stores that were open along the parade route as last year.

"At La Raza Park, the effect on the neighbors was a nightmare," said Hernandez, recalling that last year, one incensed citizen came into his office and deposited a full disposable diaper on his desk, found on the front lawn. Dolores Park says "no"

"I feel it does belong in the neighborhood," he continued. "We tried to get Dolores Park this year, but the churches, the seniors and the gay and lesbian community opposed us."

"Logistically, it would be much easier for us to do it at Dolores Park. But we don't believe in pushing things down people's throats."

Carnaval, another celebration coordinated by MECA, was held on Harrison Street this year. In past years it has been at Precita Park, Dolores Park, Civic Center and 24th Street, often moving because the neighborhood objected so strongly to the aftereffects of hosting a huge party. On Harrison, Hernandez feels Carnaval has finally found a home.

"I see this in a positive way," he said. "In America we can speak out on how we feel, but we also have a responsibility to come together and reach common ground."

But he also added: "I want those people who were dissatisfied with having it at Civic Center to call us, and help us fight to get Dolores Park."



Above: The King and Queen of Cinco de Mayo wave to their loyal subjects, cheering in the streets.



Center: Linda Ronstadt, renowned Latina recording star, belted out some complimentary songs during the parade, driving the crowd wild.

Below: Mission Life was there, passing out posters of Linda Ronstadt and a special commemorative issue for Cinco de Mayo's 25th Anniversary.



Photos: Bruce Dantzker

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The pictures show passages from the coronation held at Holiday Inn on April 14. Community personalities pictured here were present at the community events. The legendary Margaret Cruz (p3) spoke, wishing the community a good future. Representatives from PG&E (p4) were present. Sanwa Bank Manager Alonso Carrillo and his wife (p7), Assessor Richard Hongisto (p6), a candidate for Mayor, and Carlos Navarro, many more...

Certificates of recognition were given to personalities, among them Shila Giovenazzi, (p4) the manager of the Holiday Inn. Finally recognition to MECA staff (p8), who made possible this event.

CINCO DE MAYO EVENTS

Saturday, May 4th

8:00 am - 11:00 am

HEALTHY HIGH FIVE RACES

*Running *Walking *Biking *Roller-Skating
*Skateboarding *Costumes

Starting from Dolores Park and ending at Civic Center, the Healthy High Five is a focus on ways to stay healthy and fit. Award winners will be judged according to their "speed, style and spunk."

At the festival in the Healthy High Five Pavillion, health experts will provide advice on everything from head to toe--whatever is needed to keep a body healthy.

Registered participants will receive T-shirts.

Saturday and Sunday, May 4 and 5

The Cincode Mayo Festival runs from 9:30 am to 7:00 pm on Saturday, and 12 Noon to 7:00 pm Sunday. The best foods from all regions of Latin America will be available, along with three stages of non-stop entertainment.

Mariachi, Salsa, Latin Rock, Andean, Tex-Mex and more will resound at Civic Center Plaza. Stamping, swirling folklorico groups will turn out their best performances, both adults and children, and carnival rides will also be set up in the special children's area. Admission is \$3 and young children are free.

Sunday, May 5:

¡Viva Cinco de Mayo!

The Cinco de Mayo Parade will begin at 11:00 am at Bryant and 24th Street, proceed West to Mission, and head up Mission Street to finish at Civic Center Plaza. This year, the Grand Marshal of the parade is Linda Ronstadt, famed Mexican-American recording star.

Floats, dancers, musicians, marching units, charros, bands and of course the King and Queen, Prince and Princess of the parade will stream by in glorious pageantry, a sight to see. The Mission will show its finest on this day, so don't miss it.

A who's-who of the Mission rubs elbows at the Cinco De Mayo Coronation Ball