

cincy-cinco

Two-day festival celebrates local Latino community

RODNEY WILSON | CIN WEEKLY CONTRIBUTOR

In the past eight years, the area's Hispanic population has grown by 50 percent, with experts believing that roughly 60,000 Hispanics call the region home.

"There's been tremendous growth in the Latino population in the Tri-state," says Neil Comber, co-chair of the Cincy-Cinco Festival, a two-day celebration of Latino culture.

Comber co-founded the event with co-chair Alfonso Cornejo five years ago based on what he saw as a need for further interaction between groups of people living in the Cincinnati area.

"The average Cincinnati doesn't have a whole lot of experience with or exposure to folks from Latin America, so we decided it was a good time to do this," he says. "The whole objective behind Cincy-Cinco is to get the Latinos and non-Latinos together so that the Latinos can share their culture ... and the community can share the health and education facilities and organizations that are available to everyone."

"There had been some rather raucous Cinco de Mayo celebrations," Comber says. "And a number of us in the Hispanic community felt that somehow this holiday was being given the wrong idea. In fact, it's not that big a celebration in Mexico ... So we thought, let's create an event that's more about family, having a good time, and less about a raucous party late at night."

FIESTA DE PUEBLO

The result of Comber and Cornejo's hard work can be experienced this weekend at the fifth annual Cincy-Cinco Festival at Riverbend.

"We create what we call a 'fiesta de pueblo,' a town fiesta," Comber explains. "Almost every town in Latin America has a yearly town fiesta ... So we're actually trying to do that here. And the plaza at Riverbend - we've converted into a street, a 'calle,' just like in Latin America. We make it very festive, and there are lots of things for the whole family to do there."

Family is a key notion for the festival, with daytime activities featuring traditional Latin American games and crafts for kids.



Rolando Matias & Afro Rican Ensemble performs during last year's Cincy-Cinco celebration at Riverbend.

The temporary street will also include a variety of booths offering everything from traditional arts and crafts to information on health and education services in the area. Eight restaurants will also be serving up examples of Latin American cuisine. A wide variety of entertainment will be presented too, featuring everything from traditional dances to modern Latino music such as reggaeton.

NIGHTTIME ENTERTAINMENT

After the kids are at home in bed, music and dance become the focus of the event.

"At night, we transform the RSVIP club and the main stage into a place more for adult entertainment," Comber says. "At the RSVIP club, we have a DJ with salsa, merengue and that type of music to dance to. Then on the main stage, we're bringing in some groups that are well-known amongst the Mexican crowd."

The festival ends with the Macy's Conga Parade, a Brazilian conga dance down the street with costumes and a time for kids to show off their arts and crafts.

Cincy-Cinco, Comber promises, will be "a good time for everybody to come out and enjoy a wide variety of Latin American culture."

MORE WAYS TO CELEBRATE

Here are a few other ways to celebrate Cinco de Mayo on Monday.

CINCO DE MAYO CELEBRATION

WHAT: CIN Live event, sponsored by CIN Weekly, includes drink specials and music

WHEN: 5 to 7:30 p.m. Monday, May 5

WHERE: Margaritas, 24 W. Fourth St., downtown

PRICE: Free

CONTACT: 513-241-2313 (Margaritas) or CINWeekly.com

VIVA EL CINCO DE MAYO, WITH AMY TOBIN AND JAY DICKERSON

WHAT: A cooking demonstration with a menu that includes spinach con queso, pork and tomatillo-stuffed chiles, chicken Veracruz, a margarita sampler and more

WHEN: 6 to 8 p.m. Monday, May 5

WHERE: Party Source, 95 Riviera Drive, Bellevue

PRICE: \$55

CONTACT: 859-291-4007 or www.thepartysource.com

7TH STREET BAR CRAWL

WHAT: Bar crawl that features piñatas full of cash, a Mexican buffet, drink specials and music from Mission 19.

WHEN: 5 p.m. Monday, May 5

WHERE: Lodge Bar, Blackfinn Restaurant and Bar and Suite at Blackfinn, Seventh Street, downtown.

PRICE: Free before midnight, \$5 after midnight

CONTACT: 513-721-9400 (Lodge) or 513-721-3466 (Blackfinn), www.lodgebarcincy.com or www.blackfinncincy.com

JUST THE FACTS

WHAT: Cincy-Cinco 2008

WHERE: Riverbend Music Center, 6295 Kellogg Ave., Anderson Twp.

WHEN: Noon to 11 p.m. Saturday and 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday, May 3-4

PRICE: \$10, available at Riverbend day of the event, or save \$2 by purchasing at any area Kroger store. Children under age 16 are free. (All proceeds benefit Tristate charities that support the Latino community.)

PARKING: \$5; enter lots through Gates 3, 4 or 5 on Kellogg Avenue

CONTACT: www.cincy-cinco.com