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FEATURED

Napa Latinos celebrate, learn and lend a hand at Día de la Familia festival

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Youth and adult dancers from the troupe Ballet Folklórico El Valle St. Helena entertained audiences at Sunday's eighth de la Familia festival, which organizers said drew more than 2,500 people to downtown Napa.

Howard Yune, Register

It was an afternoon to get help and give help – and also a time to dance, sing, eat and have fun.

An estimated more than 2,500 people gathered Sunday in downtown Napa for the eighth annual Día de la Familia, according to organizers with the Napa Valley Grapegrowers and the Napa Valley Farmworkers Foundation. The street festival outside St. John the Baptist Catholic Church brought together 50 community and social service groups to connect farmworkers, their families and other local Latinos to health, financial, citizenship and other services – but also treated them to a summertime celebration filled with folk dancing and mariachi music.

Musicians in white suits with Mariachi Mi Tierra strolled up and down Napa Street, serenading onlookers as their full-throated voices competed for volume with their brass and violins. On a stage in front of St. John the Baptist – from where hundreds of the festivalgoers had spilled out after Mass – child and adult performers from the troupe Ballet Folklorico El Valle St. Helena treated their audience to traditional dances garbed in wide-brimmed hats or swirling multicolored dresses.

Amid the performers, taco trucks and children's bounce house and face-painting parlor, the festival's heart was to be found along either side of the street, within the booths and tables where members of private and Napa County groups stood ready to lend a hand up – from financial literacy to child support services to citizenship courses and more.

A gathering of thousands is a rare opportunity to help Latinos meet many of their needs at once, said Yadira Chavez, outreach coordinator with On the Move, a local youth leadership group.

“This is a key community event with high visibility,” she said as the festival began. “Our purpose is to show people we’re here for them; we’re here because we want to get the word out.”

In the far quieter setting of St. John’s parish hall, Napans were receiving an equally important sort of aid. Staff members from OLE Health, the nonprofit health clinic that opened in 1972, kept busy with blood-pressure readers and eye charts as they evaluated visitors without charge.

OLE Health was scheduled to provide body mass, vision or dental screenings for 200 people during Día de la Familia, according to Jennifer Churchill, spokesperson for the clinic.

The fact that health exams can share a city block with a variety of counseling and support – along with an afternoon’s worth of entertainment – speaks to the value of the festival, said Arnulfo Solorio, a co-founder and director of the Farmworker Foundation, which produces programs for health, safety, English learning and other skills programs aimed at Napa Valley vineyard workers.

“The purpose is to educate the whole family – 50 nonprofits in one spot, after church, when the whole community can come,” said Solorio, Día de la Familia’s master of ceremonies. “We have tons of information for the whole community. ... They’re all important; as a citizen of the Napa Valley, you need all kinds of information.”



Photos: Día de la Familia festival returns to Napa
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Howard Yune covers the city of Napa and the town of Yountville. He has been a reporter and photographer for the Register since 2011, and previously wrote for the Marysville Appeal-Democrat, Anaheim Bulletin and Coos Bay (Oregon) World.