

CONNECTION

Sharing Their Fiesta Time
Guatemalans, locals enjoy Fiesta del Pueblo Ixil.

By Bonnie Hobbs
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Music, dancing, laughter and fun filled Centreville's Fire Station 17, Sunday night, when local Guatemalan immigrants shared their culture during the Fiesta del Pueblo Ixil.

About 100 people attended — the immigrants and their wives and children, plus other residents, including church and Centreville Immigration Forum members.

The workers and their families planned the event with members of Wellspring United Church of Christ. They held it in gratitude for the kindness and caring shown to them by the CIF.

Two summer volunteers with Wellspring, Tim Meadows and Melanie Fox, were especially instrumental in bringing the fiesta to fruition. Meadows researched the music of the Ixil region, and Fox learned and participated in the dances.

Most of Centreville's day-labor community comes from Ixil, a small area of northwestern Guatemala, and Ixil is also the name of the immigrants' language and culture.

"They have this festival every August, back home," said Alice Foltz, who heads the CIF. "Some of the immigrants have been here, six or seven years, but this is the first time they've had a celebration like this."

On display were colorful and intricate, handmade, artisanal items including hats, shawls, placemats and napkins, belts, book covers and purses. And for many local residents, it was the first time they'd seen the men's families.

The program was written in both English and Spanish, and immigrant Alejandro Santiago welcomed everyone. Said Santiago: "It is a great joy to be able to share with you part of our Guatemalan culture, especially the culture of Ixil."

He said Ixil is populated by descendants of the ancient Mayans



Guatemalan immigrants and guests have fun doing the broom dance. Couples change partners when the music stops, and the one left without a partner dances with the broom.



Felipe Perez and Juana Chel do the dance of the king, Sunday night, in Centreville, during the Guatemalan Fiesta del Pueblo Ixil.



David Armundo, 1-and-a-half, is all dressed up and ready for the fiesta.

and was divided into four towns, Nebaj, Chajul, Cotzal and Ixil, by the Spaniards. But because it's difficult to access that region, Ixil was able to maintain its cultural identity and religious activities.

Wearing native costumes, the men and women then performed several dances for the crowd, with narrators explaining beforehand what would happen during each dance and its significance to Ixil culture.

"They practiced the dances for a month" said Foltz. "It really is a wonderful gift they've given to us to allow us to learn and enjoy many things about their culture. We hope we'll have many more opportunities to share, in the future."

Also participating was a Guatemalan woman who works in the Smithsonian Institute promoting her culture. She explained the practical functions for several items of women's clothing and then danced with a basket on her head.

Then everyone enjoyed a feast of homemade, Guatemalan food. And in case any of the immigrants hadn't heard about the proposed worker center for Centreville, Santiago told them about it.

He said things would be better for them there, than if they continued to stand along the roadsides, waiting for work. Santiago said the center is expected to be operational within the next two months, and he's happy about it. He then invited Centreville's day laborers to use and support it.

Afterward, Foltz's husband Jerry, said, "It was wonderful to see so many Hispanics here with their families. Before, it was every man for himself. Now, leadership is emerging in their community and they trust their leaders that the worker center will be run fairly."

The immigrants were also pleased that the fiesta was such a success. One of them, Jacinto Brito Morales, thanked God "that everyone could come together tonight for this program. We are grateful for all those who opened the doors to us so we could share our Ixil culture."



Enjoying the "market" displaying and selling handmade, Guatemalan hats, belts, shawls, purses, placemats, napkins and book covers are (from left) Jacinto Brito Morales, Jose Luis Lucas, Melanie Fox, Anna Lopez, Peter de Leon and Alejandro Santiago.



Peter de Leon shows a huipil — a Mayan Indian, ceremonial shirt that he made in Guatemala.



From left: Anna Guzman holds daughter Angie, 1, while Rosa Aviles holds daughter Noemi, almost 1-and-a-half.



Performing the dance of the four directions of the hemisphere are Alejandro Santiago, black shirt; Miki Carrillo, white shirt; Gaspar Matóm Ramirez, red shirt; and Felipe Perez, yellow shirt. Black symbolizes the west and sunset; white, north and the heavens; red, east and sunrise; and yellow, south and the earth.



In this scene illustrating an example of Ixil culture, Jose Luis Lucas portrays a Mayan priest bestowing blessings on a newly married couple.



Jacinta Fabiola Gonzalez carries a water jug to fill it at a well, during a dance about falling in love.



Felipe Perez, Miki Carrillo, Carlos Gonzalez, Alejandro Santiago and Gaspar Matóm Ramirez perform the "Dance of the Farmer."



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