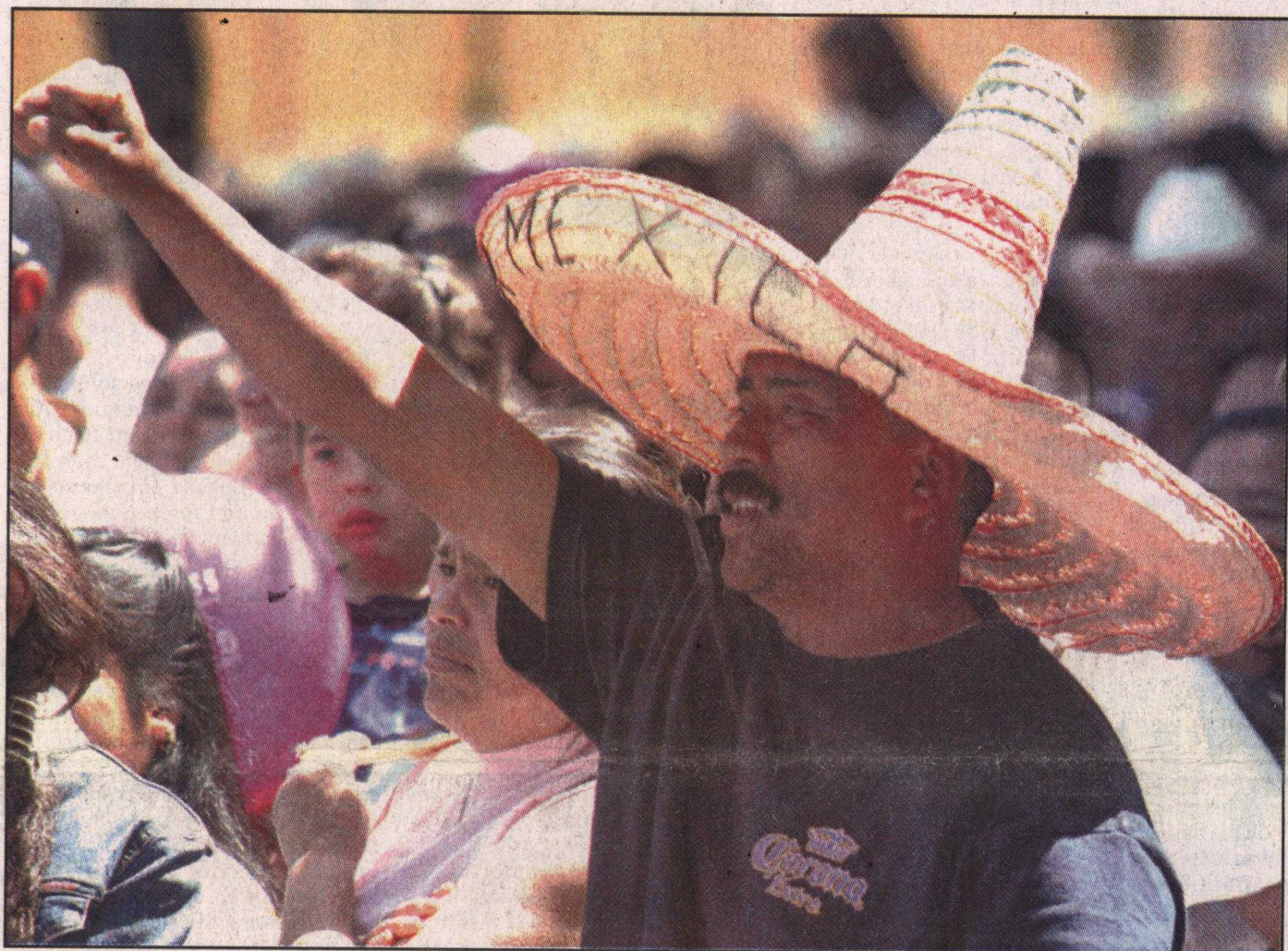


Celebrating Cinco de Mayo

Members of the local group Esperanza del Valle perform a Mexican folk dance on Main Street in front of Watsonville Plaza.

Tarmo Hannula
Register-Pajaronian



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

This man came garbed in a huge straw hat to the 14th annual celebration of Cinco de Mayo in downtown Watsonville on Sunday.

Holiday - Cinco de mayo

5-3-04

Annual festivities at downtown plaza attract thousands

By TARMO HANNULA
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

Thousands of community members showed up Sunday in downtown Watsonville to celebrate the traditional Mexican holiday Cinco de Mayo. Live music, plenty of Mexican food, events, information booths and an ample dose of sun drew thousands to the event, which filled the downtown plaza and surrounding streets.

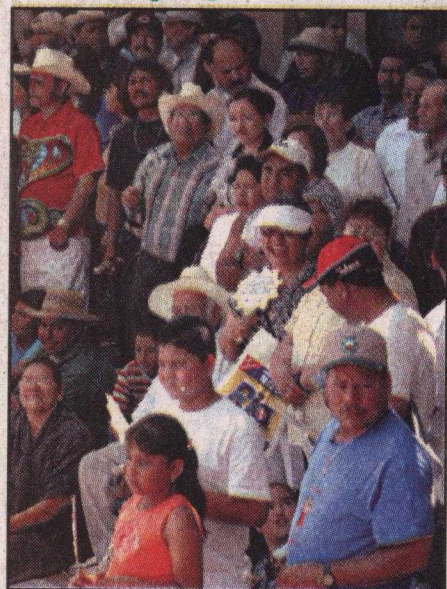
"It's a great time," said Gil Chairez of Watsonville. "I usually come out to this event each year. It's well organized. I got some good food and there's some great music. There's something for everybody."

A large stage and huge sound system



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Marcelly Savala, lead singer for the Watsonville group Marcelly y Furor del Norte, delivers an upbeat song.



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Thousands flocked to Main Street to join in the festivities during the Cinco de Mayo celebration.

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Amanda Arias of Watsonville belts out a powerful version of a popular Mexican song.

Tarmo Hannula
Register-Pajaronian

CELEBRATION

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was set up at the junction of Main and Beach streets to accommodate six feature groups, including outfits performing folkloric dancing and popular Mexican music.

Numerous food stands kept the air filled with scents of sizzling meats, corn, fruit salad and pizza. Jump houses, info stands and, one of the most valuable commodities of the day — shade — were aplenty around the plaza. With temperatures tipping toward 90 degrees, plenty of cold drinks, snow cones and sodas were the order of the day.

"On behalf of the government of Watsonville, we welcome all of you and we support Cinco de Mayo," Watsonville City Council member Ana Ventura Phares said to the audience from the main stage.

Phares outlined the importance of Cinco de Mayo, reinforcing the idea that change can happen when people come together in numbers.

"For the 14th year in a row, volunteers have come forward to make this event happen," she said.



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

Reyna Verar, 2, is delighted by a bunch of bubbles that the wind sent her way.

Cinco De Mayo is a popular Mexican holiday that recognizes a battle that took place between Mexico and France on May 5, 1862. After the French staged an attack on the town of Puebla, 4,500 Mexican soldiers, most of them ill-equipped, untrained and poorly armed, held back and eventually

fought off a French body of 6,500 well-armed, well-trained soldiers.

"Thank you for coming out to take part in this celebration," Phares told the audience in both Spanish and English. "I encourage you to vote and to participate in making Watsonville a happy and beautiful place."