

Cinco de Mayo colors Watsonville



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

Young dancers from Juventud Latina 'Genesis' wait on street sidewalk Sunday to perform during Fiestas Patrias de Watsonville.

Holidays - Cinco de Mayo

Thousands celebrate a bit early

By **JEFF TOBIN**
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Straining to contain a flame-roasted ear of corn almost as long as her arm, 8-year-old Inez Gutierrez kept her eyes on the prize.

"It's so good. I know I can eat at least two more," she said, wiping her mouth with her bare arm. "This is the kind of food I love."

Inez summed up the atmosphere on a sunny Sunday afternoon as thousands of area residents crowded into downtown Watsonville to celebrate Cinco de Mayo during Fiestas Patrias de Watsonville.

The festival might have been four days early, but people came anyway.

Organizers expected up to 10,000 people to grace the city's Plaza Central to partake in the music, the people and most of all, the food.

Vendors, many of whom were families sharing time-tested recipes, tantalized many palates. The food was almost entirely Mexican, other than the ever-popular Cassidy's pizza, and lines were long.

Ranging from beef-filled sopos to potato enchiladas, vendors sold their foods sometimes six or eight at a time. And with prices typically no more than \$2 to \$3 per plate, the prices were just right for most.

"It's really hard to come to place like this

See **CINCO** on **PAGE A12**



Annie Pelcastre shares some ice cream with her uncle, Jose Torres, at the Fiestas Patrias de Watsonville.

Monday, May 2, 2005

Cinco

Continued from Page A1

and not just completely gorge yourself on this great food," said Simon Hill of Santa Cruz. "You can bring a couple \$20 bills down here and eat until you can't eat anymore."

Most people walked around the area with their food in hand looking at some of the booths set up by companies such as car dealerships, Costco and even the Santa Cruz County Democratic Party.

While the food was the main draw, festival-goers were also welcomed by a lineup of area musical acts — all steeped in the classic sounds of Mexico.

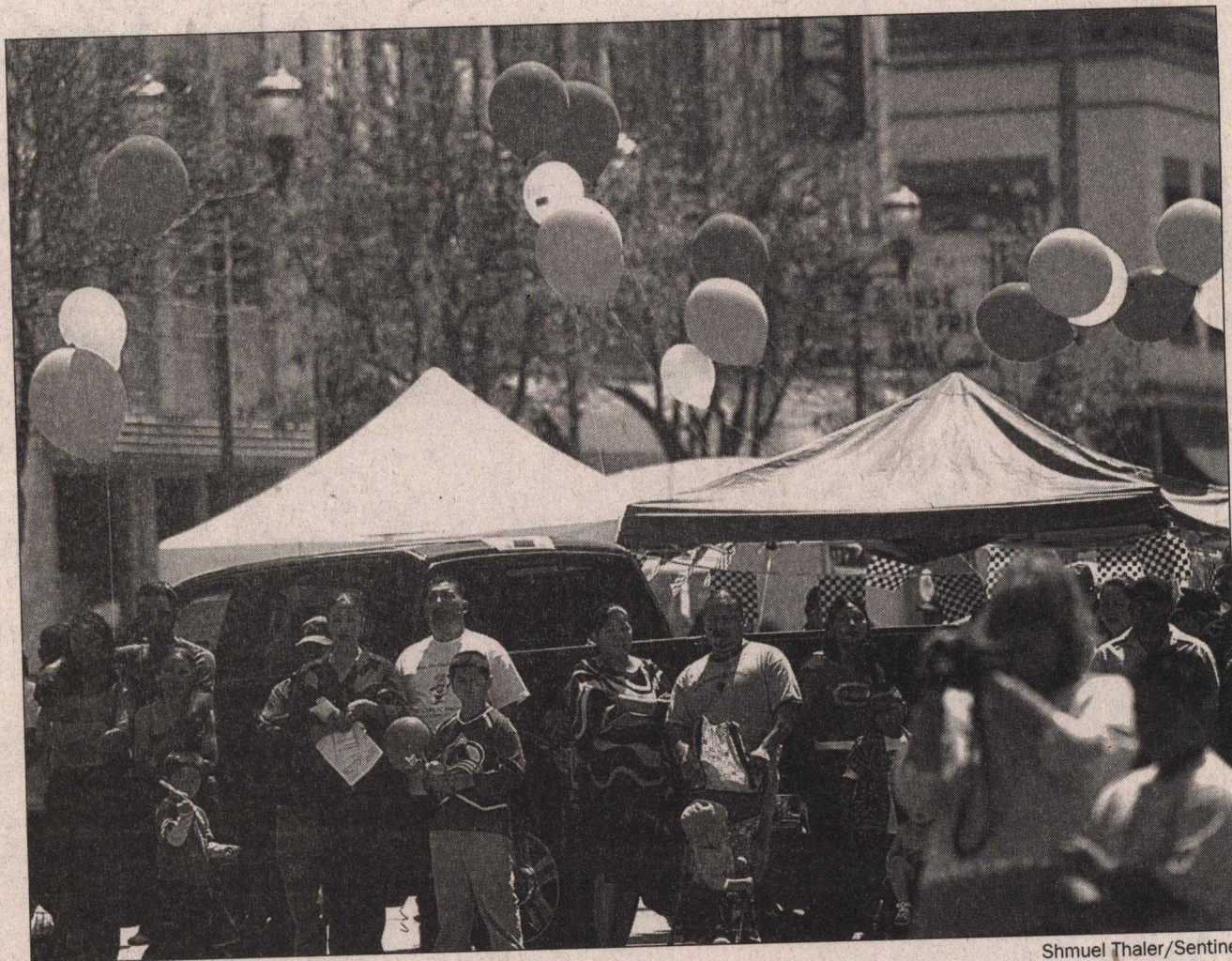
The Cinco de Mayo tradition dates back to May 5, 1862, when a Mexican militia beat back an invading French army at the Battle of Puebla. In U.S. cities and towns with large Mexican populations, it has become a day to celebrate Mexican culture.

The area of expertise for El Mariachi Eliazar Cortez y Sus Amigos is self-explanatory. Its members enticed the overwhelming crowd to step away from the relative safety of the sidewalk and onto the blocked-off portion of Main Street in front of the stage.

Juventud Latina "Genesis" — a folklore dance group with members ranging from 5 years old to 15 years old — entertained the audience with its unique brand of dancing.

"Coming to an event like this makes you feel good about who you are and what your culture is all about," said Ramon Moreno of Watsonville. "When you've got a community that supports your history and a city that backs that up with events like this, you really can't complain about too much."

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Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Red, green and white balloons fill the air and Mexican cultural pride fills the hearts of the crowd gathered Sunday in downtown Watsonville for an early celebration of Cinco de Mayo.