



# Cinco de Mayo celebration draws thousands downtown

Holidays - Cinco de Mayo

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## Festival featuring food, flags, freebies fosters family frolicking

By JENNIE TEZAK

OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

The mournful wail of a mariachi band filled the streets of downtown Watsonville on Sunday as the 16th annual Cinco de Mayo celebration swirled in full force around the downtown plaza.

The sunny, festive celebration took place between 11:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. By noon, 2,500 people had shown up for the free event, which was sponsored by Univisión. They roamed the streets, buying tacos, enchiladas, tamales and shaved ice from vendors and stopping to look at jewelry, toys, Mexican flags and other items on display.

"We're expecting 3,000 people here today," said Officer George Rivera of Watsonville Police Department.

Maureen Hebert, a housewife from Watsonville, brought her parents, newborn baby and 3-year-old daughter to the celebration.

"The food is really good," Hebert said. "We're listening to the music and trying to get into the plaza. My daughter likes the dancing and ice cream."

May 5, 1862 was a key day in Mexican history. Mexico triumphed in the battle of Puebla against France and eventually won back its independence from France, broadly recognized as one of the world's strongest armies. Many Mexicans refer to the victory as an example of will over might.

Women dressed in colorful, traditional Mexican dresses posed for pictures at

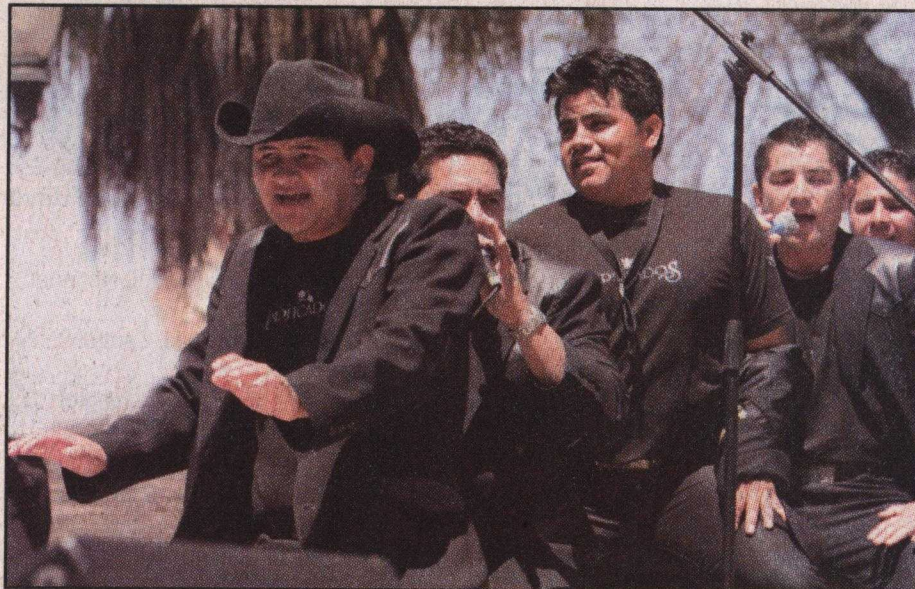


**ABOVE:** Once the music got going the crowds filled Main Street on Sunday at the 16th annual Cinco de Mayo Festival in downtown Watsonville.

**LEFT:** Leilaketzalli Piñeda, 2, sinks her teeth into a piece of corn during the celebration.

**BELOW:** The musical group Los Implicados of San Juan Rio Queretero, Mexico, dazzles the audience with a unique style of dancing.

Tarmo Hannula  
Register-Pajaronian



## CINCO

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the plaza alongside men dressed in suits and sporting sombreros.

City Council member Oscar Rios, who has helped organize both Cinco de Mayo and Mexican Independence Day celebrations with Fiestas Patrias for the past 16 years, said he thought the crowd could swell to as many as 10,000 by the time the main and final act took the stage.

"What a great day," Rios said. "This weather — it was made for us."

On Peck Street, a massive bounce house shaped like an orange giraffe and a smaller one decorated with a blow-up of Dora the Explorer rocked as children laughed and frolicked inside. Next to them, parents watched carefully as their children mounted a climbing wall.

Inside the plaza, multiple booths were set up along the walkways, with volunteers giving away free items and people lining up to enter raffles and win prizes at RIFA, a financial institution. Cingular's bright orange booth received a lot of traffic as sales people sold phones and handed out information.

The Democratic Party booth was plastered with signs reading "No on E" and "We marched May 1, now we vote." Inside, volunteers handed out fliers and brochures and urged people to vote.

"There's been good behavior here," Rivera said. "We've got a lot of good families out today."

Gabe Garcia, an administrative assistant at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, talked about what Cinco de Mayo meant to him.

"In my family, it's a nice day to celebrate and get together," he said.