



Holland: Salsa taste-testing contest, Mexican music mark Vanderbilt Charter Academy's Cinco de Mayo celebration

Posted by Erin Albanese | The Grand Rapids Press May 06, 2009 07:36AM

HOLLAND -- Zulema Martinez and her 8-year-old daughter Annabell recruited "Grandma" Tomasa Garcia to prepare her signature salsa verde and salsa roja to tantalize the taste buds of Annabell's teachers.

Garcia's colorful salsas were among 16 parent- and grandparent-made recipes brought in for Vanderbilt Charter Academy's first salsa taste-testing contest, a precursor to its Cinco de Mayo celebration Tuesday. The winners, Jamie Shreve and Dawn Fitzner, won a gift certificate to the Su Casa restaurant in Fennville.

"Annabell asked my mom because she's from Mexico and she loves Grandma's cooking," said Martinez. "She was excited and happy to do it.

"We love our heritage."

Tomato, cilantro, onions and peppers were the right mix for the 60 staff members who covered their tortilla chips with the spicy concoctions.

"The ones made with guacamole were the best," said academic specialist Dana Creevy. "We started eating them at 8 o'clock in the morning."

"In the office, we were laughing because we'd hear teachers coughing down the hallway and say, 'They got a hot one,' " laughed admissions representative Velvet Doyle.

About 53 percent of the 440 students in the kindergarten-through-eighth-grade school are Hispanic.

"Our school has such a high population of Hispanics I wanted to get the community excited and involved," said Spanish teacher Liz Neher, before introducing the band Avivamiento.

The band featured Vanderbilt students and sisters Damaris Garcia, 13, on bass; Noemi Garcia, 14, on keyboard and vocalist; and Isabelle Garcia, 8, on the drums.

The event also featured the ballet folkloric dance troupe Sol Azteca and speaker Roberto Jara, executive director for Holland-based Latin Americans United for Progress.

Students dressed in "roja, blanco, y verde," the colors of the Mexican flag, to commemorate the day that in the United States has become a celebration of Americans of Mexican ancestry.

"I'm part Mexican and my family loves Mexico," said David Vazquez, 9.

Julyssa Amaya, 8, is also a fan of the holiday, which marks the 1862 victory of the Mexican militia over the French army.

"We have games and we eat good food and we have chips and stuff," she said.

© 2009 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.