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Diez y Seis celebration mixes old and new in Mesilla

By Ashley Meeks Sun-News reporter

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To see more photos from the Diez y Seis celebration, [click here](#).

MESILLA -- Diehard Mesilleros and newcomers alike packed the streets and plaza of Mesilla for the annual Diez y Seis de Septiembre celebration Saturday.

The events continue today from noon to 7 p.m.

While the mariachi music and Mexican food is traditional, the celebration has changed over the decades, according to lifelong Mesilleros Henry and Maria Avalos, who said the whole town used to attend.

"Lumber and latillas -- that's what they used for the booths back then," said Henry Avalos, who, with the Leones de Mesilla, once built a replica of the Mesilla Plaza gazebo for the fiesta parade. "Back then, they would have tamales, chile verde con carne. They didn't have turkey legs."

"You always had to buy a new outfit," said Maria Avalos. "We used to do square dances."

Though they said most Mesilla residents don't attend, the Avaloses come for the music, dancing and gorditas -- and for the entertainment of watching the younger generations climb the greased pole and break piñatas.

"We always like to come and see what's new," Maria Avalos said.

This year, that included the new Secundaria Estatal 8360 de Ciudad Juárez school military band, said Mesilla special events coordinator Kristie Medina. More than 5,000 people were expected in Mesilla -- down from 2008 because of competing events like the state fair and the NMSU Aggie game, she said.

"It's not for everybody. We have family that doesn't understand why we've done this," said attendee Cindy Tokarczuk. "They think we're in Mexico."

The celebration of Mexico's independence from Spain was one of the first events she and husband Ray attended upon retiring to Las Cruces just over three years ago from the Boston area after a 26-snowstorm winter.

The main draw Saturday for the couple was the music, though the relleños and corn elotes were tantalizing, too. "We come every Sunday for the mariachis, and the (Diez y Seis de Septiembre) parade is just a lot of fun. And we like to people watch," Ray Tokarczuk said.

"It's a nice time of year," Cindy Tokarczuk said. "There are festivals almost every weekend."

Ashley Meeks can be reached at ameeks@lcsun-news.com; (575) 541-5462.

If you go

What: Diez y Seis de Septiembre celebration

When: Noon to 7 p.m. today

Where: Mesilla Plaza, west of Avenida de Mesilla

Parade winners

The following are winners of Saturday's Diez y Seis de Septiembre parade:

Best band: Gadsden High School Marching Band

Most Spirit and Best Overall: Six Guns and Shad Ladies, El Paso

Best Float: Head Start, Mesquite

Most Creative Float: Calavera Coalition of Mesilla