



## Families fete Mexican independence

COACHELLA — Organizers say about 3,000 people attended Sunday's "El Grito" Mexican Independence celebration at Veterans Park in Coachella.

Older women huddled under handheld umbrellas shielding themselves from the blistering sun while young mothers pushed small children in strollers.

Children bounced and giggled in inflated jumping castles. Others stood in a steady line to get their face painted by a clown or to have "Rayito" - a.k.a Francisco Sanchez - twist a colored balloon into a sword or a ladybug bracelet.

Families sat sprawled out on the grass in front of the park stage near City Hall listening to performers such as 7-year-old Miguél Ángel Millán of Borrego Springs, who recorded his first CD in April. El Potritro de Sinaloa, Spanish for the little pony of Sinaloa, sang one of his original songs, "Cristo Rey."

Other musicians included Banda Ocumichena and Eevaán, who sang cover songs by Journey, Cee Lo Green and Santana.

With \$2 tacos and \$1 snow cones, the event was family- as well as wallet-

friendly.

"When you have a big family, you need affordable prices," said Mirna Flores, president of the Coachella Chamber of Commerce, which co-hosted the fiesta with the city.

The smell of smoked carnitas wafted through the park, beckoning the hungry to take part in the celebration.

"If you're trying to lose weight out here, it's not going to happen," said Coachella Mayor Eduardo Garcia, who insisted his corn on the cob go light on the mayonnaise and butter.

The Coachella celebration dates back to the 1950s with Dr. Reynaldo Carreon's King Corn fiesta, said Roger Larrañaga, emcee of the event.

"He originated it so we could have our fiestas so our traditions would not be lost," Larrañaga said.

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In Mexico, the event dates back to the early morning hours of Sept. 16, 1810 when Roman Catholic priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla ordered his church bells rung in the small town of Dolores.

The Grito de Dolores, or the cry of Dolores, marked the revolt against the Spanish colonial government in Mexico and ultimately led to the Mexican War of Independence.

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