Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month

Events range from a St. Paul art festival to a Minnehaha Mosaic parent dinner

By Henry Beck
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This time of the year is special for numerous reasons; the season is changing, it's getting near the end of the year, school is starting, and the 15th of September marks the beginning of Hispanic Heritage Month. Hispanic Heritage Month is something that means something different to everyone.

"Hispanic Heritage Month means a lot of things," senior Santi Aguirre Millan said. "I can learn how to become bolder in my ethnicity and my race, and to be more educated on how Hispanic Heritage Month can make a positive impact for me and my generation and the next generation to come."

Hispanic Heritage Month takes place during this time to honor the independence days of various Hispanic countries, such as Mexico, Costa Rica, and Guatemala.

The Twin Cities has had countless celebrations of these independence days as well as Hispanic Heritage Month as a whole.

One very notable thing about all these events is the use of striking colors. A magnificent example of this pop of color can be seen in alebrijes, sculptures of mythical animals, and it just so happens that St. Paul currently has a stunning exhibit of these creatures on the Mississippi River's Raspberry Island near downtown St. Paul. The exhibit *Alebrijes: Keepers of the Island*, is a free, outdoor museum set up with 16 abstract and awe inspiring alebrijes.

Alebrijes are a form of Mexican folk art started around the 1930s by famous paper mache artist Pedro Linares. As the story goes, Pedro was terribly ill when the idea of crazy, colorful, and confusing creatures came into his mind. Since then, it has been a large part of Mexican culture.

Aguirre Millan said the intense color that all these dream-animals have in common brings spiritual meaning.

"I think back to the Day of the Dead, and how that whole celebration sparks the idea of, 'Let's think back to our ancestors, our family members who passed away and who are now living among the dead,'" he said. "And I think the reason why the pop of color is so prominent is because when people think of death, they usually think of black and gray and sad colors. But alebrijes are supposed to be more like spirit guides for people who want to be guided in death.

The pop of color makes alebrijes easy to identify.

"You can acknowledge them," Aguirre Millan said. "They're bright and prominent, like, 'oh, that's an alebrije ... that's a spirit guide.' And the color just signifies the idea of more like, 'this light, this presence, is happiness,' ... you're supposed to be happy in the sense that this thing is guiding you, and you're supposed to celebrate the idea of how beautiful it looks."



Photo by Henry Beck

"Patapez" (Fish with feet), by Alejandro Camacho Barrera, is part of the outdoor exhibit, *Alebrijes: Keepers of the Island*, on display through Oct. 26 on Raspberry Island in downtown St. Paul.

Spanish teacher Anne Calvin also sees meaning in the bright colors of alebrijes.

"I feel drawn to bright colors," she said. "Bright colors feel celebratory and vibrant and beautiful. I think that there's something that kind of communicates life and energy with bright colors."

The exhibit features 16 separate sculptures by four different artists. The exhibit is set to close on the 26th of October this year.

But Alebrijes are only a small part of what makes Hispanic Heritage Month what it is. The truth of the celebration is that it doesn't need to be just a month.

"My hope and prayer is that it's not just isolated to Hispanic Heritage Month," Calvin said..

Aguirre Millan hopes more people at Minnehaha be inspired by Hispanic authors and speakers.

"Someone who has impacted me and my life is Cesar Chavez, who was a man who stood up for farmers and Hispanic workers, who wouldn't take the minimum wage, which was like $1 to like a penny per hour," he said. "I think if we can bring light to people who made a Hispanic impact to our American country, we can start to educate people and see how Hispanics have also shaped America to what it is today. Because, to be honest, America wouldn't be what it is today without Mexicans, African Americans or other cultures. So showing more presence of Hispanic Heritage Month and how important that is would be an amazing thing that we get to do at M.A."

Annual Mosaic dinner

Minnehaha's **Mosaic Parent Group** will hold its annual Hispanice Heritage Dinner on Oct. 2 from 5:00 to 7:30 p.m. The evening will feature dinner, a presentation and salsa dancing.

Any interested in attending is asked to RSVP by Monday, Sept. 29 through the invitation sent to school families via Parent Square by Paulita Todhunter, Minnehaha's director of diversity.

This year's dinner features the theme "Experiencia Ecuador!" Students will give a presentation about Ecuadorian culture.