

Cinco de Mayo celebration flourishes in downtown Reno

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Walking through downtown Reno Saturday sporting a colorful sombrero several feet high, 16-year-old Ramon Lopez said the food — particularly the fruits and chili — are among things he enjoys about Cinco de Mayo.

But eating wasn't the only thing on his mind.

"I check out the girls," Lopez said. "I'm walking up and down the street looking for girls. I've got to go search for them."

As the Mexican-American celebration consumed much of downtown Reno, those out for the festivities had myriad reasons to have fun.

Dawn Villa of Ceres, Calif., said the food is a draw but the music and atmosphere help make the event.

"I love the dancing and I love the culture," Villa said. "It's decorative and romantic."

Numerous vendors selling things from lemonade and beer to jewelry and art lined several city blocks. Musicians could be heard performing live and through speakers while the aroma of Mexican food lingered in the air.

Stuart Ollikalla, area director of Chevys Fresh Mex Restaurant, said it was his first time the business took part in the event since expanding into northern Nevada four years ago.

"It shows people who might not otherwise come into the restaurant what we have to offer," Ollikalla said. "Cinco is the biggest day of the year."

The day began with a 5-kilometer fun run to benefit Nevada Hispanic Services. The 3.1-mile course, which drew almost 150 runners, began in Idlewild Park and finished at Wingfield Park. Participants weren't timed, but Agustin Arroy and Laken Crowder were the first male and female finishers, respectively.

Clayton Middle School student Joshua Smitz, 13, a member of the school track team, said he likes taking part in fun runs because they raise money for charitable groups and because no stopwatch means less pressure.

"With this one, you don't have a time limit," he said.

However, Joshua said he still tries to finish ahead of his dad, Charles Smitz.

"Today is a good time for us to spend some time together," Charles Smitz said.