

Festival of many flavors

Diversity celebration welcomes a few thousand to downtown

By PERRY SWANSON THE GAZETTE

A few thousand people attended the "Everybody Welcome" diversity festival Saturday in downtown Colorado Springs. The event featured music and dance performances, cooking demonstrations and dozens of information booths.

Dance performances alone were a showcase for a variety of cultures. Some of the dance styles included hip-hop, hula hoop, American Indian, Latin American, Hawaiian, Gypsy, Japanese, Irish and belly dancing.

WHAT IS DIVERSITY?

Diversity comes in many flavors, said several people who attended the festival. Here are some of their answers to the question: "What's diverse about you?"

c "I really think my family," said Ally Koerber, who attended with her mom and a few nieces and nephews. Koerber, who's Hispanic, said she grew up in a family that went out of its way to learn about different cultures. She said she views the festival as a positive development for the city.

"This is so cool that we don't have to travel too far for things like this," she said.

c Hearing loss is a form of diversity for Bob Knox, an organizer for the Hearing Loss Association of America Southeastern Colorado Chapter.

c "What we're down here talking about is about 10 percent of the population that's impacted by hearing loss," he said.

People with diminished hearing sometimes become isolated because they can't participate in social situations, but it doesn't have to be that way, Knox said.

c "Being black, of course, is diverse," Ellen Wilkerson said. "Just being female is diverse. Being a mother is diverse. Being a stay-at-home mom, now that's very diverse."

Wilkerson said she keeps busier as a stay-at-home mom than she did in the professional world. Still, sometimes she tells people at parties she's a stay-at-home mom and gets the response: "Oh, really? What do you do?"

c "A way I'm diverse is that I can relate to a lot of people," said Katrina San Luis, a high school student who visited the festival with her friend, Lauren Nikolas.

Nikolas had a different take: "I'm diverse by my goals in life and my opinions," she said. "I'm looking for success, but it's not like I want to be rich or have fame."

c "I'm a mutt," Dave Schmitt said about his background. "I'm German, there's Dutch, there's Welsh, there's all kinds of stuff in there. Colorado — you can't get any more diverse than we are here."

BACKGROUND: A group of businesses, charities and government agencies called the Colorado Springs Diversity Forum put on the event. It was intended to celebrate the cultures of people who live in Colorado Springs. The event ran into controversy in April, when some City Council members raised questions about gay participation. The City Council agreed to contribute \$10,320 in government support despite the participation of gays. This month a few Jewish and black leaders said the festival doesn't really reflect diversity.



KIRK SPEER, THE GAZETTE "Badia" (Renee Larrabee) performed a nontraditional Oriental sword dance Saturday as part of the "Everybody Welcome" diversity festival at Acacia Park.