



Mary Jane Leung of Hopewell Junction dances during Sunday's Latin-American Festival at Dutchess Stadium in Fishkill.

PHOTOS BY KARL RABE/POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL

Hispanic culture heats up festival

Latin-American event, in 16th year, provides food, music, dancing

By Susan Campriello
Poughkeepsie Journal

FISHKILL — The sounds of salsa music permeated the area around Dutchess Stadium on Sunday afternoon during the 16th annual Latin-American Festival.

Some festival-goers danced in the hot sun while others ate rice, pork and fried plantains, among other foods.

Irene Santiago of Hopewell Junction said the festival's Spanish food and music reminded her of her native Puerto Rico.

"Even though you are away from it, you get a little piece of it," she said.

The 18-year-old John Jay High School graduate was the recipient of the Hudson Valley Latino High School Scholarship, for which the festival is a fundraiser. She plans to enter Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh in the fall and hopes to become a nurse.

Santiago said she believes cultural festivals help break down negative stereotypes.

Education of Latin-American culture and history is key, said Newton Paul, Andre Paul and York Kemp, of Spring Valley, Rockland County, who, at the festival, sold decks of "Latin Her-



Ismael Santana, left, and Lydia Santana, both of Wallkill, sit under an umbrella while the music plays.

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HISPANIC: Cards feature famous figures

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itage Cards" they produced.

The decks of 52 playing cards feature historic figures such as U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the first Hispanic Supreme Court justice; José Martí, who became a symbol of Cuba's struggle for independence; and physicist Franklin Chang-Díaz, the first Costa Rican astronaut; along with dozens of artists,

athletes and diplomats.

"We picked industries and nationalities that we felt are relevant to the tri-state area," Kemp said, adding that by 1 p.m., the team had sold roughly 25 decks.

The cards can help children learn about Latin America in an interactive manner, he said.

Norma Ramirez, the vice president of R&M Productions, which put on the festival, said the event historical-

ly draws close to 5,000 people. Sunday was the first time it was held at Dutchess Stadium rather than at Riverfront Park in Beacon. She said the event allows members of the Hispanic community to enjoy their shared culture and make business contacts.

"It's really nice to catch up with old friends and make new ones," the Poughkeepsie woman said.

Yolanda Santana, 43, said

Sunday was the first time her family had attended the festival but she had run into many of her Wallkill neighbors there.

Her mother, 64-year-old Lydia Santana, a Bronx resident and native of Puerto Rico, said she appreciated hearing live Spanish music.

"I love it," she said.

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