



Thursday, October 17, 2002

## Hispanic heritage celebrated during month

By **Mary E. Iorio**, OU Writer

Oakland University culminated its monthlong celebration of Hispanic heritage on Oct. 16 with two musical performances of "Tres Vidas" as well as the announcement of winners in a university-wide essay contest.

"We wanted to promote the understanding and importance of the Hispanic culture in the United States," said Assistant Spanish Professor John Paul Spicer-Escalante, who chaired the heritage month planning committee along with his wife and fellow Assistant Spanish Professor Maria Spicer Escalante. "Hispanics now make up the largest minority group, with 12 percent of the population, and its growing. So the Hispanic culture will continue to have a great influence on America."

Events over the month spanned from lectures offering insight into Hispanic culture across nations and religions to salsa dancing lessons, storytelling and a fiesta offering foods from seven different nations.

On Oct. 16, OU President Gary Russi led the closing ceremonies by explaining the celebration's importance to the university mission.

"These events speak to our efforts to provide a richer and deeper undergraduate experience for our students by sharing cultural understanding," Russi said. "Oakland University's enrollment has increased significantly in recent years. We have more students choosing OU specifically because we offer a diverse community here."

Graduate student Lisa Dillon then announced the winning essays:

First prize went to Anna Rivera for her thoughts on the impact Latinos have had on popular American culture. She described how Americans don't understand the diverse nature of the culture, with its influences from Mexico, Spain and South America.

"To a Latino family," she wrote, "the family is precious. It provides a special strength and bond that keeps your values high and strong."

Second prize went to Josephine Njoh, whose heritage combines the Hispanic and Liberian traditions of her parents.

"Josephine's essay highlights her own personal struggle to assimilate into American society while still maintaining the Liberian traditions she brought with her," Dillon explained. "This has heightened her appreciation for many privileges, most notably the privilege to attend college."

Honorable mentions were awarded to: Paolo Carascon, Elsa Luliani, Helen Kehr, Stefanie Marshall, Stelanie Marshall and Monica Sroka.

The closing ceremony ended with reaction from student Iryna Embry.

"On behalf of all the students here, I want to thank the university for these programs," Embry said. "Some of the events were thoughtful, such as the lectures on strength in diversity, and some were entertaining such as the international coffee with its salsa dancing. My feet still hurt. But the thing that touched me most was the presentation by Patricia Kofman-Razi on the Jewish-Hispanic experience."

In her lecture, Kofman-Razi described her family's flight from Argentina to Israel after her father became one of "The Disappeared" in that nation's conflicts. "Her mother had the fortitude to escape to Israel," John Paul Spicer-Escalante said. "For Patricia, growing up Jewish in a traditionally Catholic culture affected her life tremendously."

Students in Spanish classes wrote essays in response to Kofman-Razi's lecture. Their papers were presented to her at the Oct. 16 closing ceremonies to share their support for her.

"Let me say that it is a real honor to have you among us as a fellow student." Embry said.

### SUMMARY

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