



Thursday, October 2, 2003

Hispanic Celebration enriches OU community

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

The Oakland University community experienced many facets of Hispanic culture over the past two weeks as many diverse events were held on and off campus during Hispanic Celebration 2003. Students, faculty and staff participated in lectures, film screenings, tango lessons, cultural presentations and even a guided tour of Detroit's Mexican Town.

"There was something for everyone," Associate Professor of Spanish Ron Rapin said about the celebrations, which ran Sept. 15 through Oct. 1. "I was especially pleased that 23 people made the trip to Mexican Town. For many attendees, it was the first time they had ever been there. We had lunch at Xochimilco's (an area restaurant), shopped along Bagley Avenue and took a walking tour of the area.

"It's important to celebrate Spanish culture, particularly because there is a large Spanish population in our area. Metro Detroit has more than 50,000 Hispanics, and they bring with them great cultural richness."

Among the other celebration highlights was an International Students and Scholars Office Coffee Hour. Oakland's international students gathered in the Oakland Center Fireside Lounge to meet and mingle, sample Hispanic food, and peruse a display board containing images depicting tango moves, Latin American clothing organized by region, and biographies of figures as diverse as Pablo Picasso, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Desi Arnaz. Two flamenco guitarists also provided entertainment.

Two contests also accompanied the celebration. Junior communications major Elizabeth Gregory won the Hispanic Celebration poetry contest and \$100 for her original poem that dealt with the themes of pursuing your dreams and dismissing narrow-mindedness. Seema Shah, a graduate student in biology, took second place and won \$75 for her poem, written in the style of a Japanese haiku. Gregory, Shah and other students read original poems as well as works by other Hispanic authors in a coffee house atmosphere in the Fireside Lounge. Some students read works in Spanish, then offered translations. Senior biology major and Spanish minor Eva Villarreal won the **Hispanic Celebration essay contest** and \$100 for her paper addressing cultural identities at Oakland.

"It's important to have a sense of cultural awareness because it helps to see the world from a different perspective," said senior Spanish major Aimee Nefcy, who is treasurer for Oakland's Hispanic Club. The student organization set up displays offering information on its activities in the Fireside Lounge during the celebration's closing ceremonies, also held in the Fireside Lounge.

"There is a large Hispanic population in the metro Detroit area, and it's surprising that so few people know that," Nefcy said. "There are quite a few Hispanic students in my classes, particularly the upper-level ones. It's interesting to get their perspective on issues and see the world through their eyes."

Oakland University's Spanish Club organizes events such as cultural movie nights, visits to local Hispanic restaurants, tango lessons, trips to Mexican Town in Detroit and Chicago, and other activities related to Hispanic culture. The organization meets in the Honors College each Thursday at 5:30 p.m. to practice conversational Spanish. Meetings are held afterwards from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. For more information, visit the **Spanish Club Web** site or contact the Center for Student Activities at (248) 370-2400 or csa@oakland.edu.

In addition to the events of the past three weeks, Soledad O'Brien, co-anchor of CNN's "American Morning" and former co-anchor of NBC's "Weekend Today," will speak on "Diversity in Broadcasting" Thursday, Nov. 13, at 4 p.m. in the Oakland Center Banquet Room. O'Brien is the daughter of an African-Cuban woman and an Irish-Australian man. In 1997, she was awarded the Hispanic Achievement Award in Communications. O'Brien also was named to Irish American Magazine's "Top 100 Irish-Americans" list in 1998. She is a member of the National Association of Black Journalists and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists. O'Brien is a graduate of Harvard University.

SUMMARY

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