

Day of the Dead Día de los Muertos

Sunday, November 1, 2009
4:00 to 7:00 p.m.
Gualala Arts Center
- Admission is Free -

Day of the Dead will be celebrated at the Gualala Arts Center on Sunday, November 1 from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. Complementing the celebration will be an exhibit of shrines and the exciting return of the Los Caporales de Santa Rosa Mariachi troupe performing with the Coast Folkloric Dancers. Authentic Mexican food and drinks will be available for purchase.

While Día de los Muertos is a tradition unique to Mexico, it is becoming a very popular holiday in the United States. Javier Chavez, bilingual bicultural family advocate for Action Network, comments, "There is an appeal here which just crosses right over the culture line. People who are Latino, who speak no Spanish, really relate to the experience. I think this is because it's an integration of life and death - it's about family togetherness, and honoring who we are. This eases the grief of losing someone we care for, and it takes away the fear."

America's traditional Halloween has its roots in ancient Celtic festivals marking the dissolution of the boundaries between the living and the dead. To protect the crops and livestock, they arranged celebrations to placate and distract the roaming souls. The Catholic Church introduced All Soul's Day and the belief that souls were released from Purgatory and allowed to walk the earth so the tradition began of making offerings to these feared souls.

The Mexican expression of these ideas seems to have selected the best of all these traditions. The elaborately iced sugar Calaveras (skulls) bring out the kid in each of us while the traditional altars reveal a reverence for those who have died. As you walk among the

hand crafted altars on display, the "artists" will gladly introduce you to who is being honored. Often there will be their favorite food, something to remind them of their favorite past times, many photographs of their life and occasionally favorite hats or boots. You will walk away feeling you know a little about that person and how much they are remembered and still loved by family and friends.

Many well-known local artists use their skills to adapt their favorite media into something shrine-like, often with a touch of humor, but always respectful. The shrines were so successful in 2008 that this year the exhibit will expand into the Burnett Gallery and Jacob Foyer plus on the beautifully landscaped grounds. The exhibit will be up through Sunday, November 15.

Enjoy the shrines, feast on the home-made tamales, but what you will remember is the mariachi troop singing from the heart, people dancing everywhere and the swirling skirts of the folkloric dancers. All generations of the local Mexican community clap for their favorite Mexican state dance while all generations share the warmth of the local community.

