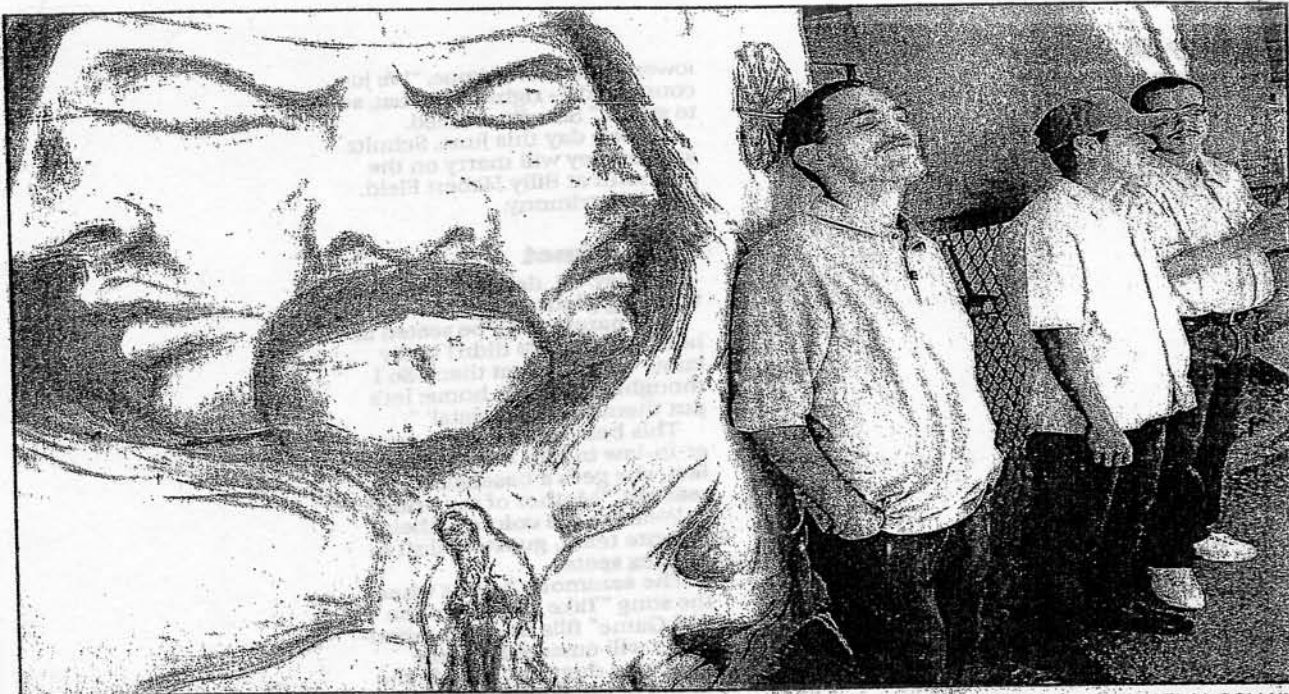


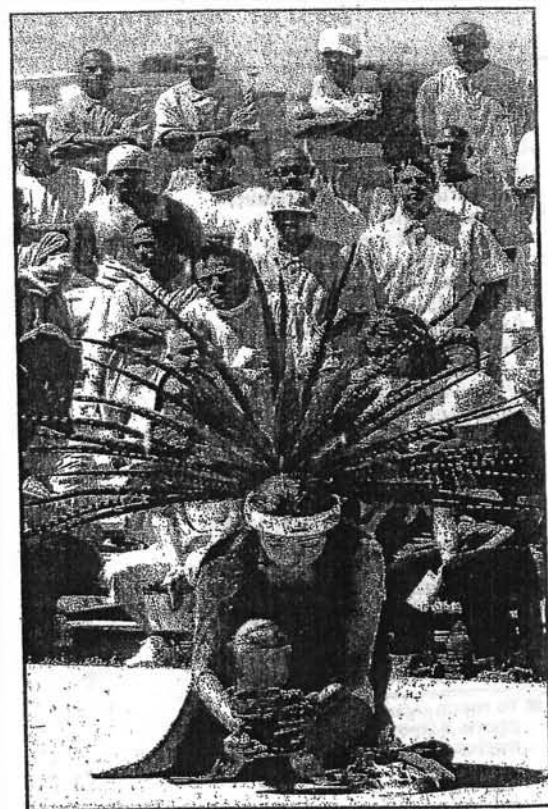
"Everyone on these bleachers here is full of pride, that's what it is."

— Anthony Corona, 19-year-old inmate



Record photos by MICHAEL McCOLLUM

PRIDE: Rafael Noriega, left, of Sonora, Mexico, rests against a wall decorated with the Mexican flag and another banner at Deuel Vocational Institution during the eighth annual celebration at Deuel is the largest of its kind at any California state prison.



HISTORY: Starr Saavedra, a dancer with the troupe "Izkalli," begins a ritual before the performance as Deuel inmates and guests

DVI celebrates Cinco de Mayo

By Nancy Price
Record Staff Writer

TRACY — The calendar read May 11, but Saturday was Cinco de Mayo at Deuel Vocational Institution, where inmates applauded wildly for mariachi musicians and held hands while skipping in a long chain alongside dancers in Aztec Indian costumes.

To inmate Manuel Hernandez, a 33-year-old Mexican national who serves on the prison's Committee for Mexican Culture, Cinco de Mayo represents unity, peace and cultural awareness.

It's also a source of pride for Latino prisoners, said inmate Anthony Corona, 19, of Fontana. Corona stood among other inmates on bleachers overlooking a basketball court that was part of the celebration's makeshift stage.

While Aztec dancers performed before them, accompanied by a steady drumbeat, the inmates sat and stood in

ers here is full of pride, that's what it is," said Corona, who will be paroled in August after being convicted for assault with a deadly weapon.

Saturday's event drew about 150 Latino and Asian inmates to the outdoor recreation yard at Deuel, a medium-security men's prison east of Tracy. Black and white inmates remain confined to their cells and housing units as a result of a melee last month on the same recreation yard that injured five, including a correctional officer.

Cinco de Mayo celebrates the victory of Mexican troops over French invaders in the city of Puebla in 1862, an event that encouraged the growth of Mexican nationalism.

The eighth annual Cinco de Mayo celebration at Deuel is the largest of its kind at any California state prison and was a joint effort of Barrios Unidos, a social-service organization that focuses on anti-violence, Deuel staff and the Mexican community.

lowed by a Giant's game. "We just connected — right off the bat, so to speak," Schultz recalled.

So one day this June, Schultz and Dooley will marry on the diamond at Billy Hebert Field. Call it matrimony.

Ty the knot

Dooley, 38, described the wedding plans.

The parents will be seated at home plate. "We didn't really know where to put them. So I thought, 'Family is home; let's put them at home plate!'"

This beats sticking the mother-in-law in foul territory. In fact, she gets a baseball shirt reading, "Mother of the bride."

Wearing the colors of their favorite team, guests will sit in the box seats.

The ceremony begins when the song "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" fills the park. Attendants will emerge from the opposing dugouts. Clad in the colors of the Giants or A's, they will steal to the bases.

"We're also going to have this couple — friends of ours who are going to be married — in the on-deck circle," Dooley added.

CINCO

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Deuel also schedules a June-teenth celebration celebrating African-American heritage and an American Indian powwow.

Ayodele Okanlawon, a Deuel teacher who helps organize the cultural events, said they wouldn't be possible without strong support from the prison's warden and high-ranking administrators.

The events are useful on many levels: They smooth out cultural differences between inmates and can ease tensions, and they also may help give inmates a new sense of direction in their lives to guide them after they are paroled, Okanlawon said.

The Mexican consulate, which sponsored mariachi performers at the Deuel Cinco de Mayo, has taken a growing interest in Mexicans who are serving time in California prisons, said Juan Hernandez, an

economic affairs staff member representing the consul general.

The Mexican government has heightened its interest in providing educational and cultural opportunities to imprisoned Mexicans in an effort to improve their chances at employment once they are released and returned to their homeland, Hernandez said.

Although some critics say inmates should not enjoy events such as Cinco de Mayo, they lose sight of the fact that most inmates will some day be released and returned to communities, said Daniel Alejandro, executive director of Barrios Unidos in Santa Cruz.

"We want to give them a bit of hope that people care about them," Alejandro said. "In here, they're paying for their crime and getting the opportunity to change their lives. But if there is no one to support them, we pay the price on the streets."

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