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Día de la Familia a hit

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As the joyful sounds of banda music filled the air, about 18,000 people gathered Sunday at the Salinas Sports Complex to enjoy the 12th annual Día de La Familia.

Latino recording artists, including Valentin Elizalde and groups such as Tiranos Del Norte and La Dinastia De Tuzantla, headlined the free afternoon music festival, which included food and vendor booths and children's jump houses.

The sumptuous smells of Mexican food wafted over the concourse area as families mingled with teens and 20-somethings parading their most stylish outfits. Guests without a cowboy hat were in the minority at the festival.

Jose Gonzalez of Salinas said it was an event his family would not miss.

"Today has been fun for us, because we love this music," said Gonzalez, who waited with his sons Gabriel, 7, and Edgar, 5, in the children's area. "It's good for families to have an event like this."

Jorge Mendoza, 26, of Salinas, said he was enjoying everything about Día de La Familia, especially the band Montez De Durango.

"They really performed well today," Mendoza said. "Everyone here has been peaceful. It's just a great event."

A crowd favorite was singer Alicia Villarreal, who wore a cowgirl hat and black shirt and jeans. Fans snapped her picture as she sang love ballads and Mexican pop songs.

"Que pongan las manos pa'rriba (Put your hands up in the air)," Villarreal exhorted the crowd.

People-watching in the stage level is a favorite activity for Araceli Osnaya, 25, of Castroville, who was back for her fifth festival.

"I think the best part is that this event is free," Osnaya said. Although the festival charged no admission, to get in guests had to pick up tickets beforehand from various locations announced on event sponsor KLOK 99.5 FM - Radio Tricolor.

Still, dozens of people had to be turned away around 4 p.m. when security workers closed the gates. Salinas police reported no major incidents during the festival and no major traffic congestion before or after the event.

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