



Press Release

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National *El Día de los Niños* celebration grows exponentially

San Antonio, TX – The *El Día de los Niños Celebrating Young Americans* holiday has taken a giant step forward this year.

It's not just the more than 100 cities that will celebrate the national holiday, a gift from the Latino community to celebrate children everywhere and ensure their health and well-being, says Rebeca Barrera, president of the National Latino Children's Institute (NLCI), which began organizing the event in 1998.

"This year, Idaho is making the day an official holiday. Corporations are sponsoring concerts and activities throughout the country," Barrera says. "Some cities are partnering with the General Consulate of Mexico to bring the celebration to their communities."

Dick Kempthorne, governor of Idaho, declared *El Día de los Niños* a permanent holiday in the state so that "communities are encouraged to participate with special events with children at the center," according to H.B. 259. As in previous years, the U.S. Senate will also declare the holiday nationally.

In addition, new national sponsors are supporting the holiday at unprecedented levels. Kraft Foods is sponsoring celebrations in four cities, with educational activities highlighting healthy lifestyles. Mervyns is sponsoring book giveaways in three cities, as well as performances by acclaimed children's author and singer José-Luis Orozco. Scholastic Inc. will also sponsor book giveaways at celebrations in 10 cities. The Ford Motor Company Fund is announcing its commitment to child passenger safety at the Miami celebration, where they will sponsor car seat giveaways and checkups.

Songwriter Javier Galvan has written a song for the holiday. The message is one of inclusion for children everywhere.

"What started as a celebration with a Latino flavor has become a unifying event for all the cultures of a community," Barrera says. "Each community celebration builds on the cultural heritage and strengths that helped forge the community, and because *El Día de los Niños* honors all children, everyone feels welcome to bring their own cultures and background to the celebration."

San Antonio, Texas, will celebrate with a festival with food, games and activities. The General Consulate of Mexico and Mervyns are sponsoring Orozco, who will perform two children's concerts. Botoncito, the King of Clowns, and the music group Jucanto—both from Mexico—will also appear courtesy of the consulate.

In Columbus, Ohio, Nationwide Insurance will host a citywide children's parade and festival, with bilingual storytelling, informational booths on home and fire safety, piñatas, and Latin American drumming and dance mini-workshops.

In Salt Lake City, children are collecting old eyeglasses to give to people who cannot afford them, as well as nonperishable items to donate to the local food bank; they may also participate in a Spanish spelling bee, enter an essay contest and learn cultural dances that will be performed the evening of April 30.

Some celebrations include as many as 10,000 children and others are smaller, with only a few hundred children or individual families.

U.S. Rep. Rubén Hinojosa, D-Texas, who has participated in every celebration since its inception, sees the holiday as an opportunity to evaluate the status of the youngest citizens of a city—as a vehicle for change. By asking elected officials to “give them their day,” young Americans are asking adults and policymakers to include youth and children in their plans for the future, Hinojosa says.

“El Día de los Niños provides a bridge for children to learn more about being an American. Their first hands-on civics lesson is to ask their city council to declare the day. What better way to be a contributor to American culture?” he adds. “Young Americans have told the nation what it should be doing. They have accepted the gift of a special day from the Latino community and are building a national celebration of hope and diversity for all children in the United States.”