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Organizers Say Civic Engagement, Mexico's Natural Beauty & Culture Drive More Than 100,000 People to Weekend Conference/Expo

COFEM, Azteca America & Plaza Mexico say event offered immigrants hope for the future, while strengthening ties to their culture and heritage

LOS ANGELES (Oct. 16, 2007)—Organizers of a weekend long conference and exposition that drew more than 100,000 people said the large turnout reflected a growing interest in remaining civically engaged and connected to their culture and heritage.

The Council of Mexican Federations in North America (COFEM), Azteca America and Plaza Mexico hosted the 2nd Annual Binational Conference and Expo Mexico at Plaza Mexico in Lynwood, October 12-14. The event opened with Friday night's "El Pueblo Awards," which featured comments by California Assembly Speaker Fabian Nunez and Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

The conference contained 20 workshops on critical issues facing the immigrant community as comprehensive immigration reform and access to higher education. As part of the conference, KAZA-TV 54/Azteca America produced Expo Mexico, which presented food, entertainment and expositions showcasing various regions of Mexico, including the country's natural and man-made wonders.

"For three days, many in the Latino immigrant community studied the issues, asked the questions and found hope for the future by embracing the opportunity that passage of 'The Dream Act' would create for themselves and their children in this country," said COFEM Executive Director Arturo Carmona.

(The federal Dream Act allows the best and brightest immigrant students who've grown up in the United States to apply for temporary legal status, eventually obtain permanent status and become eligible for citizenship if they go to college or serve in the U.S. military.)

In addition to immigration reform and higher education, the conference featured workshops on health education, civic participation and 2008 U.S. Presidential Elections. Notable workshop participants included Mexico's Secretary of Social Development Beatriz Zavala Peniche, California State Senator Gil Cedillo, Los Angeles Police Department Asst. Chief Sergio Diaz, among others.

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Expo Mexico showcased the 13 natural and man-made Wonders of Mexico, which included Chichén Itzá, Teotihuacán, and the state of Michoacan, winter home of the Monarch butterfly. The expo also presented music and traditional dances from various regions of Mexico, art exhibitions, Mexican cuisine, performances by many artists including Mexican Mariachi music singer Pablo Montero.

“Our goal with Expo Mexico was to highlight the greatness of the Mexican culture for the entire family to enjoy and to share with the younger generations, who may not have had the chance experience Mexico themselves,” said KAZA-TV 54/Azteca America General Manager Jorge Jaidar. “These cultural exhibitions reminded them of their country of birth and the values that they brought to the United States, which remain deeply embedded in their hearts and souls.”

Friday night’s “El Pueblo Awards” paid tribute to Latino leaders from both sides of the border for their support of the immigrant community. The honorees included Speaker Nuñez, who received the award for Civic Leadership, and legendary Los Angeles activist Dionicio Morales (Community Leadership), Los Angeles School Board member Monica Garcia (Educational Leadership), Anheuser-Busch executive Paco Bendaña (Corporate Leadership), and radio personality Juan Razo of “Que Buena” 105.5FM in Los Angeles (Entertainment Leadership).

“Plaza Mexico was proud to play host to this year’s Binational Conference and Expo Mexico because it’s our way of giving back to the Mexican-American community,” said Mario Cardenas, public relations director for Plaza Mexico. “I think we’ve set the bar very high for next year’s event.”

About COFEM

COFEM is a nonprofit organization serving the immigrant community since 2004. Its mission embraces a community centered approach to promote the advancement of the Latino community through public policy advocacy, educational and cultural programming, strategic mobilization, community organizing, and bi-national economic development. COFEM serves the immigrant community and hundreds of immigrant-based organizations from across the nation.

About Azteca America

Azteca America is the fastest-growing Hispanic network in the United States. The network is a wholly owned subsidiary of TV Azteca S.A. de C.V., one of the two largest producers of Spanish-language television content in the world. Azteca America currently has a presence in 55 markets throughout the United States

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