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Sister City Association celebrating 40 years

By Eric Michael Stitt

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The Hermosa Beach Sister City Association is celebrating 40 years of helping Loreto, Mexico, grow into a town that is full of modern amenities and programs that improve the quality of life for its citizens.

On July 14, the HBSCA will hold its Folklorico Fiesta from 5 to 10 p.m. at the extravagantly decorated Hermosa Beach Community Center to commemorate the sister city relationship that has spanned more than four decades.

"They've done so much for Loreto," said Jane Walker, director of public relations for the HBSCA. "They've done so much to improve the quality of life in Loreto. It's nice to have a relationship."

The HBSCA is a nonprofit organization that has created a junior high student exchange program, provided medical assistance such as a 20-bed medical clinic and paramedic training, educational funding for computer labs and classroom supplies, child health and welfare, prescription eyeglasses for deprived students and a new cistern for the town's local school.

Hermosa Beach's association meets once a month and consists of 150 members, which is larger than any neighboring town's sister city program.

"We have a very strong sister city program," said Deborah Wright, HBSCA president and event coordinator. "Hermosa has the most active members."

The celebration will feature a cocktail reception, a strolling mariachi band, a short documentary about the HBSCA, and various beverages and foods from local Mexican restaurants. The party's main event will be a performance by Grupo Folklorico Sabor de Mexico, a group of dancers that

recently won the grand prize at the folklorico competition in Barcelona, Spain. The group is from Carson and has performed its specific regional dances from Mexico all over the world.

"The dancers with their rich colorful skirts and long butterfly sleeves are so graceful, it takes your breath away," Wright said.

Wright said the group beat out 52 other countries including 1,400 other dancers at that competition in Spain.

Rudolfo Davis, the president (mayor) of Loreto and Loreto's City Council, will also be in attendance along with Hermosa Beach city officials, according to Walker. The other special guests will be Loreto students involved in the exchange program.

The student exchange is the HBSCA's longest running program. In 1974, Hermosa Beach resident Joe Diaz discovered that after seven years in existence, the HBSCA was basically inactive. So on his 60th birthday, he went down to Loreto with a welcoming letter and spoke with Loreto's mayor. Diaz said the mayor didn't know about the sister city relationship, but became very excited about it. The two had a lengthy discussion about the possibility of sending Loreto students to Hermosa Beach, he said. Diaz reported back to the school board and the student exchange program was immediately created.

Wright said the reaction from Hermosa Beach students is very positive after visiting Loreto. She said a lot of the exchange students said it's the best thing they've ever done and because of it, they always return with a desire to travel around the world. Now 33 years later, Diaz will be attending this party that will help fund one of the programs he created.

"At this point, I'm very proud it's working so well," Diaz said. "Hermosa Beach is doing a lot for Mexico. It's very successful."

The last sister city fund-raiser was in 2004, but it was not as elaborate nor did it have as many performances as this one will, Walker said.

According to Wright, this celebration should be a huge success because it's recognizing a 40-year effort to help better a town that is not as fortunate as Hermosa Beach. She hopes a lot of people will show up to commemorate the accomplishment.

