



NICE festival integrates arts, culture this weekend

Event held from noon to 9 p.m. on Saturday

By Kaitlyn Krasselt

NORWALK — After nearly two years of work and preparation, organizers of the inaugural Norwalk International Cultural Exchange Festival are running on adrenaline, caffeine and pure excitement in the final days before the festival takes place this weekend.

Janet Evelyn, executive director of the nonprofit NICE Inc., said she's expecting about 4,000 people to attend the festival, set for noon to 9 p.m. Saturday at Oyster Shell Park. Admission is free.

"Norwalk has always been a bastion of multiculturalism," Evelyn said. "This is a tremendous opportunity for Norwalk to celebrate its diverse community, and it's the perfect place to celebrate because Norwalk has been hailed as one of the most diverse cities in this area."

The festival was born from a partnership between the nonprofit and the city's Recreation and Parks Department after members of both organizations found there was a void in cultural events in Norwalk after several had been canceled or discontinued. Evelyn said there used to be several small festivals put on by individual cultural groups but never has there been

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NORWALK

Norwalk Mayor Harry Rilling shakes hands with Janet Evelyn, executive director of the Norwalk International Cultural Exchange festival.

Contributed photo



NICE

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an all-encompassing festival to celebrate the many cultures in Norwalk.

The festival will start with a Children of the World portion from noon to 4 p.m., which will feature children and familyfriendly activities and performances including face painting, a Maritime Aquarium petting pool and poetry reading in four languages — Creole, Arabic, Chinese and Spanish.

At 4 p.m. the main stage will open with a Flamenco performance, followed by several local bands and concluding with headlining act Bushman, a Jamaica native, known for his lyrics and showmanship. There will also be a number of multicultural vendors at the festival, and during the 4 p.m. hour, Evelyn said there will be a ceremony at the park's commemorative garden to remember the children killed in the Newtown shooting in 2012.

"We have worked really hard to maintain that multicultural aspect," Evelyn said. "There will really be something for everyone and it will be a celebration of the many cultures here in Norwalk."

Katherine Chaverra, a student at Norwalk Community College, has been Evelyn's assistant throughout the planning process for the event. A psychology major, Chaverra said she ran into Evelyn at the career center while looking for an internship related to her major. Instead, she found the NICE Festival.

"The reason I liked this is that the purpose of psychology is to help people, and this is about helping and uniting cultures," Chaverra said. "So while it may not seem related, it is. I really believe in this purpose and the reason we're doing this."

Chaverra was born in Colombia but has lived in Norwalk for 10 years. She said the festival is a great representation of the city she's come to know and love.

"If you grow up here, you know how diverse it is," Chaverra said. "This festival encapsulates that."

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