

The MILLERTON NEWS

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The Millerton News Editorial

Diversity has long been a cornerstone of America

Living in a close-knit, rural community offers advantages too numerous to count. If one were to try they would include (among others): a focus on family values; an appreciation for the countryside; a deeper understanding of agriculture; an acquaintanceship with one's neighbors; and an enjoyment of a slower-pace of life. But there are downsides to living in the country. One of the biggest is the lack of cultural diversity.

That's why it's so heartening when there are efforts made to expose countryside communities like the Harlem Valley to different cultures. Case in point, the Latin-style harvest festival called Kermes La Cosecha, held on Sunday, Sept. 23, at the Amenia Town Hall.

The festival was sponsored by the nonprofit Somos La Llave del Futuro's Somos Cultura program, made possible partly through a grant from the Dutchess County

Arts Council. Created in 2003, the organization's goal is "to create leaders in the Latino immigrant communities in the Hudson Valley and Catskill area," according to its website.

It further explained its vision: "To achieve social transformation within the immigrant communities through empowerment and leadership, nourishing us in our diversity and working on recognizing human rights through education and action."

The festival offered all things Latin, from food to dance to family games. There was even a tamale contest, which offered participants the chance to taste an array of creative tamale combinations before selecting the winner. Best of all there was information on human services from local agencies present at the fair, to help empower those within the Latin community.

Part of why learning about other

cultures is so important is because ultimately it provides those cultures with the footing to climb the social ladder, and to deal with this country's white majority (which is steadily changing in today's world) on equal ground. There needs to be acknowledgement, and ideally acceptance, by every American, that all cultures are valid and each just as important as the next. Exposure is a crucial step to such acceptance, and the more we see of people from various backgrounds the more all of us, especially our children, will welcome people — no matter where they are from — into society.

Our modern culture, particularly in this country, is a melting pot; it took immigrants from every nation in the world to create ours. America would not be America if it were not for those who traveled from their native homelands to discover a new home in the United States, and to make the commitment to become

naturalized.

Fortunately, most of those who made the journey brought with them pieces of their culture to introduce into ours, enriching our knowledge and experience as global citizens. For that we should all be thankful, as well as respectful, and when there's an opportunity to learn more about cultures different than our own we should jump at the opportunity.

Who, after all, would want everyone to be the same? That would not only be monotonous, but it would provide little stimulation and challenge — which would get old pretty quickly. Humans are, by nature, dynamic and fascinating beings; we should embrace that. Introducing ourselves to different cultures makes the human experience all the more interesting. The greatest Americans own that philosophy; is it therefore any wonder that those from other cultures would want to someday become Americans, too?