

Viva La Comida! Festival Celebrates Jackson Heights, Elmhurst Culture

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ELMHURST — Musicians, food vendors and pint-sized dancers helped celebrate the culture of Jackson Heights and Elmhurst at Friday night's Viva La Comida! festival.

Organizers shut down Ithaca Street between 82nd Street and Baxter Avenue in order to make room for the bustling crowd, who looked on as local musicians performed on stage and kids from the Mestizo Arts Center danced the night away.

The event also drew attention to the ongoing renovation of Dunningham Triangle, a \$200,000 project by the 82nd Street Partnership.

"We're thrilled with the turnout, with the energy," said the Partnership's Executive Director Seth Taylor. "We couldn't have asked for a better inaugural event."

Neighbors chowed down on food culled from across the city by food blogger Jeffrey Orlick, including local vendors like Jackson Heights' Arepa Lady and Tacos La Familia.

Especially daring foodies tried out the Tortas Pumas, a \$14 sandwich from Corona's own Vendies finalist Tortas Nezas, which includes chicken cutlets, eggs, ham, beans, cheese and fried hot dogs.

Lifelong Jackson Heights resident Pat Lowenhaupt, 59, was anxiously waiting on one of the long vendor lines that stretched across 82nd Street.

"Food is always a draw," Lowenhaupt said. "I don't think you can go wrong having a food festival anywhere."

In addition to the music, food and dancing, art and clothing vendors organized by Design For You were stationed outside the Jackson Heights Cinema, and traditional Colombian flower arrangements by Silleteros de Santa Elena adorned the triangle.

The festival was a great way to showcase local cuisine and creativity, said 34-year-old Jackson Heights mom Katie Musselwhite-Goldsmith.

"It's nice to see the local talent, and sample foods from everywhere," Musselwhite-Goldsmith said.

Alvaro Duque, a 59-year-old retiree who moved from Elmhurst more than 10 years ago after growing up in the neighborhood, said he was just visiting the area and was pleasantly surprised to stumble upon the festival.

"It's the first time I've seen this around here," Duque said. "Everything's changed."