

Mexican immigrants enjoy 'American' picnic ST. LOUIS IMMIGRATION

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Body

Cultural dissonance was in full display here at the first annual Mexican picnic in St. Louis.

Hundreds of Hispanic immigrants, mostly Mexicans, were enjoying a Sunday afternoon at a park in Creve Coeur, playing volleyball - many clearly learning as they play - and eating hamburgers.

"That's not normal for us," says Cecilia Velasquez, who organized the event.

So why are they doing it?

"People are living here now, so we have to start living the culture you have here," she says. "We are trying to do what the Americans do. We don't want the Americans to see us as having our own little culture, a little Mexico inside the United States."

At the same time, she adds, Mexicans need to retain important elements such as family values or having the children stay home until they're married.

Originally from Mexico, she has been in Alton and then St. Louis about a decade. She is editor of a local Spanish newspaper, Red Latina, and host of a Spanish-language radio program.

"We are the first generation of Hispanic immigrants. Most of our American friends don't know how to deal with Hispanics. We are new here. Or maybe they don't see us, because we are working in yards, on roofs, in restaurants. Everybody sees one here, one there, but never together."

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