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Help from above?: Por La Gente happy with weather for fund-raiser

BY ABE WINTER, Sept. 1, 2002

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RACINE -- The organizer of this weekend's 25th annual Por La Gente Association fund-raising festival thinks the group gets a little divine help with the weather.

"It's a beautiful day," Roy Morales, president of Por La Gente, said Saturday. "I always said God is Mexican, too, because he always gives us a good weekend."

Island Park was a whirl of activity on a beautiful Saturday as the second day of a three-day fund-raising festival wrapped up.

The nonprofit organization features softball and basketball tournaments, a golf outing and children's activities in its annual effort to raise money for athletic and academic scholarships. It also provides aid to families.

"All the money we raise goes to scholarships," Morales said. "We also like to assist families to help them get their young kids into organized sports. Everybody's having a wonderful time participating in all the things we have."

A full day of activity, capped by the championship games in the 16-team men's and six-team women's softball tournaments is planned for today.

"Basically, it's a family outing during the Labor Day Weekend," said Alex Cruz, who coordinates the softball tournament. "We try to keep it a fun thing because everybody's friends and some people just come to watch the games."

Although there appeared to be considerable camaraderie at Island Park, the play on the field was serious as teams tried to unseat defending champions -- Club 400 of Waukesha (men) and R& M Auto of Racine (women). R&M lost its first game in its bid for a three-peat, but expressed confidence it could come all the way back through the loser's bracket like it did last year.

The teams, which receive invitations to compete, are from Racine, Kenosha, Waukesha, Milwaukee, Madison and Waukegan, Ill.

"Every year in April, when the softball season starts, teams are calling to see if they can play in our tournaments," Morales said.

Cruz, who also lives in Racine, said about 1,000 people attended Friday and that between 1,500 and

2,000 would be at the various sites Saturday. With several of the teams eliminated, Sunday's attendance figures to drop to under 1,000.

Moralez heads a group of 13 board members and 40 to 50 volunteers. He and his wife, Jane, who was busy selling tickets Saturday, join Alex and Diane Cruz in providing many volunteer hours for the organization. Lucy Martinez is another active booster.

Moralez, a former boiler engineer for 23 years with Racine Unified School District, currently works as a greeter at Sam's Club after having all his toes on both feet amputated due to diabetes. But his devotion to Por La Gente and coaching continues.

"There's also a lot of support from the community, mostly financial support," he said.

"We're trying to keep it local through small donations, but we're also looking to work with big companies such as Johnson, Case, Harley Davidson and others," Cruz said.

Also at the event Saturday were representatives of the Miss Latina Racine 2002 Scholarship Program. In its fifth year, the nonprofit organization hopes to award \$5,000 in scholarships and will announce the winners Sept. 20 at Festival Hall.

Carmen Martinez, now a junior at UW-Milwaukee majoring in architecture, is the Miss Latina Racine 2001.

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