



# Lab employee crowned Queen of the Española Fiesta

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For as long as she can remember, Monique Vigil and her family have attended the Fiesta del Valle de Española every July. One of Monique's earliest recollections was riding a float as part of the festival's parade.

On February 24, 2017, Vigil competed for the position of Reina de la Fiesta del Valle de Española. The next day, she learned that she had won the title of "Queen."

Monique recalls that participating in the competition brought about a combination of nerves and excitement. "I competed with three other girls," she says. "We each introduced ourselves in Spanish and English to a panel of judges, who then had the opportunity to ask us questions. We were judged on appearance, poise, personality, sincerity, our ability to communicate comfortably in both Spanish and English, and our overall knowledge of the history of the Española Valley."

Monique Vigil.

## Honoring the past and embracing the future

Since around 1934, Española has celebrated the festival, which honors the founding of Santa Cruz de la Cañada, one of the earliest Spanish settlements in what would become the United States. Spanish conquistador Juan de Oñate y Salazar established New Mexico's first capital in 1598 at what would become Española. The festival's main purpose, however, is to celebrate the cultural diversity found in the region. Events occur throughout the year, with the main part of the festival taking place July 6–9.

"It begins with a Blessing of the Officers at the Plaza de Española, where the community comes together in prayer," Vigil notes. "We pray for the brave men and women who serve in law enforcement and ask for guidance for the Fiesta Council made up of volunteers who promote, manage, and sustain the fiesta. On the following day, there is a Valley Torch Run to honor those who lost their lives during the Vietnam War. After an Evening Prayer (known as a Vespers Mass), the festival proper opens with a carnival and live music. The final day of the festival consists of a grand parade at noon, with a closing mass that early evening."

## Keeping Traditions Alive

In addition to participating in festivals in surrounding areas such as Taos, Las Vegas, and Santa Fe, each festival queen sets a personal goal that involves performing acts of kindness throughout the valley. This year's official theme for the festival is "Un Valle Unido y Fuerte," which means "A Unified and Strong Valley." Vigil's personal goal honors this theme by interacting with the next generation.

"My personal goal is to reach out to the children of Española, principally through the elementary schools. I want to pass on what I know about my culture and its rich history, so that these traditions continue to flourish. I realize that as La Reina I represent a role model for these children, someone who represents integrity and serves as a mother figure. The mother figure is very important to various cultures, including my own."

Vigil during a school visit.

[Read a longer version of this profile here.](#)

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