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Some candy hearts and a little Spanish

By Karen Gutiérrez
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NEWPORT - Armed with candy hearts and a smattering of Spanish, about 50 high-schoolers swarmed around Newport on the Levee this week.

Their assignment: Pass out the hearts. Explain how great it is to learn another language. And do it all in Spanish.

"Some (shoppers) were just surprised, like, 'Oh, my gosh,'" said Dearis Hoard, an eighth-grader at Holmes High School. "Some talked back to us in Spanish, and we were overwhelmed. We had to get one of the Spanish teachers to help us."

The ringleader of Wednesday's exercise was Adriana Melnyk, who teaches Spanish at Newport High School. She planned the event as part of a national campaign, called "2005: The Year of Languages," to promote bilingualism.

Each student got three boxes of candy hearts imprinted with messages in Spanish. Translations were written on the back of the box.

Students also memorized a Spanish phrase to say as they stopped shoppers.

"We decided it's very empowering to go up and talk to people, and they say, 'Huh?' " said Molly Deaton, a student at Newport High School. "I'm big on knowing something other people don't know."

Joining Molly and her classmates in the adventure were students from Holmes and St. Henry District High.

"These kids are going to be more open to the idea of having foreigners in their cities," said Ligia Cuevas Jones, a St. Henry teacher.

"The world's coming to us," added Holmes instructor Cebele Rivera Joseph. "We can't hide."

Although some Levee shoppers looked like they wanted to.

Several people refused to acknowledge Whitney Richmond and three classmates as they approached. But Whitney, a sophomore at Newport High, was not deterred.

"Do you speak Spanish?" she asked a man in the restaurant of Gameworks. "We are trying to advertise the Spanish language."

He answered that he knew "a little bit" and then referred the students to a cook behind the counter.

Uh oh. He was a native speaker.

"Hola! Cómo estás?" Feliciano Rangel asked the students. "Yo necesito aprender inglés."

The students nodded. They got it...sort of.

"Remember, we're beginners," Whitney said.

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Christina Meyer (from left) Michelle Guffey and Kathy Hitchcock speak Spanish with Cecilia Garcia at Newport on the Levee. Photos by Patrick Reddy/The Enquirer [Zoom](#)



Candy hearts with Spanish phrases passed out by students at the Levee. [Zoom](#)

