Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University,

Emily Yeap: Honoring and celebrating the history, culture and contributions of citizens of Latin heritage – that's the goal of Latinx Heritage Month in September. Missouri State University will host several events to engage and educate the campus and larger community about Latinx heritage. I'm Emily Yeap.

Here with me today to discuss the significance of the month and highlight the celebration are Yvania Garcia-Pusateri, MSU executive director of Multicultural Programs and Melissa Gutierrez, a senior political science and modern language major at Missouri State.

Garcia-Pusateri.

Garcia-Pusateri: Similar to the other heritage months, this is a month again to celebrate the richness of the culture for Latinx, Latino and Hispanic people, especially here in the States. What we want to do with the programs here on campus is to spread awareness of the community here in students, among staff and faculty and especially the greater community in Springfield, and to do events that are educational, as well as celebratory.

Emily Yeap: To truly understand and appreciate Latinx culture, people should make the effort to immerse themselves in it, notes Garcia-Pusateri.

Garcia-Pusateri: Get out and learn about Latinx people, whether it's watching films about the Latinx community or engaging with Latinx students, staff and faculty here on campus, as well as going to various events in the community. There are different Latinx restaurants and churches and Latinx-owned businesses. I think that would be a great way for people to really connect with the community.

It's about people taking the initiative and really engaging with that type of cultural understanding and I think it's important that people really don't look to the media as well just because given how Latinx people are portrayed in films, that's still pretty stereotypical. A lot of Latinx people still don't have roles where their culture is really truly reflected.

Emily Yeap: During these times where anti-Latino sentiments are high, what can people in the Ozarks do to better support the Latinx community? Gutierrez explains.

Gutierrez: On a personal level, first show your support for Latinx, Hispanic-owned businesses or communities because treating them like any other human being is the best thing we can do. Also realizing that Hispanic, Latinx, these are terms that we have created or made, but they're very broad. This includes many Latinx, Hispanic people from different countries who speak different languages who look extremely different and I think acknowledging that first is very important because not only do we look different, speak different, but we also have different backgrounds. We have different immigration status and we all have different futures so you can't put us into a box.

Emily Yeap: Garcia-Pusateri also believes voting wisely is crucial.

Garcia-Pusateri: I think right now especially as elections are being discussed, it's important people really invest in who they're voting for because who they vote for is going to impact the people and their neighbors around them who possibly will be Latinx people.

Emily Yeap: The Latinx Heritage Month celebration at Missouri State begins on September 4th according to Gutierrez.

Gutierrez: Our first event will be the Latinx kickoff. Kind of just having it to be a nice fun event to get people involved and aware of Latinx Heritage Month. We decided to have a big Loteria game and what Loteria is, I like to best describe it as our version of Bingo, but it's still a little different without numbers, but there's pictures and so we are going to be adapting it where it can be a much larger game and more interactive.

Emily Yeap: The kickoff event is from 1-3 p.m. at the Plaster Student Union North Mall. Another highlight is the Carnaval: Latinx Heritage Month Banquet on September 21st in the Plaster Student Union Ballroom. Doors will open at 5 p.m. and the event starts at 5:30 p.m. Garcia-Pusateri offers more details.

Garcia-Pusateri: Menu is different dishes that are showcasing different Latin American culture, traditional foods, home type of food that people in the Latinx community are used to eating and then we'll be having different performances from different student organizations and we're looking to also include people from the community as well. What we're hoping with this banquet, as well as our other banquets is again to showcase the culture that is among our students and staff on campus, as well as the culture in the community and bridging those gaps between campus and community in coming together to celebrate the richness of Latin American culture.

Emily Yeap: An online RSVP is required to attend the banquet. It's free for students, but $10 for staff, faculty and community members. Payment must be made in cash at the door. For a full schedule of events with times and locations, visit missouristate.edu/multiculturalprograms.

I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at (417) 836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at KSMU.org.