

Youngsters to light up the night with colorful lanterns

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LAWRENCE — Holding a plastic soda bottle wrapped in tissue paper, Eric Tejada gingerly wrote each letter of his name in red, blue and silver glitter pens.

He gave it a ghoulish look by pasting purple pumpkins and black bat cutouts.

"It's Halloween and it goes with the season," said Eric, 7, a second-grader at Guilmette School.

Eric was among 500 youngsters at city schools and after-school programs who made lanterns from clear and green plastic soda bottles to be showcased Sunday at Canal IllumiNations. Lanterns will be filled with sand on which candles will be set.

Karen Wood, project manager of Live Lawrence, said IllumiNation evolved from the First Night celebration in the city.

"The whole purpose of Live Lawrence is to expose people to the open spaces in the city," she said. "Even though it's an outdoor event, it will be a warm and cozy place to be."

This year's festival will take on a Latin flavor, in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month.

In addition to the various colors and designs lighting the canal, the event features Afro-Cuban rhythms, merengue, salsa and mariachi music, a Brazilian martial arts troupe, and performances by Dominican dancers and Movement City, a youth program that is part of Lawrence CommunityWorks.

In addition to the Boys & Girls Club and Lawrence High School, other creative talent came from youngsters at the YMCA, YWCA, Esperanza Academy and Essex Art Center.

This was the first time Lawrence High art teacher Eric Allshouse decided to involve 25 of his students in his Introduction to Color class with the project. I want them to explore a sculptural form of creation that we've not done before," he said.

Senior Yelimar Maisonet, 17, a student in Lawrence High's Humanity and Leadership Academy, used red, blue and white crayons to paint the Puerto Rican flag on her bottle. She added, "RIP Abuela Lencha," in memory of her great-grandmother, who died two days ago.

"It's Hispanic Heritage Month and this is part of who I am," Maisonet said. "I want to show pride in my heritage."

Jimmy An used scissors to make edges on the bottle. He then decorated it with red-and-white paper emblazoned with a star in the middle.

"I did the spikes to be unique," said An, a junior in the Humanity and Leadership Academy. "I added the star because that's something you see at night and it will match the scene of the parade."