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sal pizarro

Pizarro: Inauguration was a crowd-pleaser at Mexican Heritage Plaza

By Sal Pizarro
Mercury News
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It might have been a continent away, but watching President Barack Obama's inauguration Tuesday morning at the Mexican Heritage Plaza's theater felt close to being there — without the freezing temperatures.

The auditorium was packed with 500 politicians, community leaders, students and everyday folks. Everyone stood up when Joe Biden was sworn in as vice president and did so again for Obama. There were cheers during the oath and ovations during the inaugural speech, which was projected on a giant screen.

Of course, there were local speeches, too, by San Jose Mayor Chuck Reed, San Jose City Councilwoman and co-host Nora Campos, Hispanic Foundation Executive Director Teresa Alvarado and Leon Beauchman, an AT&T executive who talked about the change he's seen since growing up African-American in Meridian, Miss.

But the most heartfelt moment came when Joyce Randolph, a jazz vocalist and retired San Jose teacher, came onstage and led a hand-holding crowd in a soulful rendition of "America the Beautiful." Aretha Franklin doesn't have anything on Randolph.

TOASTING THE PRESIDENT: Over at the Lobby Lounge at San Jose's Fairmont Hotel, happy hour started early at 11 a.m., with people enjoying a daylong celebration of the inauguration.

The fanciful martinis and margaritas on the menu included the BlackBerry (Obama isn't allowed to have that one), the

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Lame Duck, the Economic Stimulus and the Yes We Can.

They were all \$10 — except for the Bailout, which was just \$6 "since it's government-subsidized," the Fairmont's Lina Brody joked.

KIDS SUMMIT: There's still

time to register before the Friday deadline for the Santa Clara County Children's Summit, which is being hosted by Kids in Common, an organization that aims to improve the lives of the county's youngest residents.

The Feb. 3 event, which will run from 8 a.m. to noon at San Jose's Wyndham Hotel, will include a youth panel and a keynote speech by Anthony Trujillo, a nationally known educator who has drawn attention for his work with school dropouts. Applied Materials also will be honored with the Bold Steps for Children Award for its corporate philanthropy.

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San Jose's Mayor Chuck Reed and council member Nora Campos where in the crowd... (Josie Lepe)

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