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By Stephanie Simon

Visitors to the first Taste of Postville festival last September participate in a Russian folk dance. Taste of Postville featured a variety of foods prepared by members of ethnic groups living in Postville.

New job mixes cultures in Eastern Iowa town used to its own ways

Postville adjusting to jolt of diversity

Postville makes the front page of L.A. Times

T his story about Postville's diverse ethnic population ran Tuesday on the front page of the million-circulation Los Angeles Times.

Its author, Stephanie Simon, managing editor of the Los Angeles Times/Washington Post News Service, was selected for the front page because the blending of immigrants into a newly all-white community, immigrants that southern Californians see everyday, made the story appealing.

"It was a little scary at first," said Becky Meyer, a lifelong resident. "You'd see the first time I'd ever heard them speaking Hebrew. On their way to the pharmacy, they pass a Russian store decorated with bullfight posters. When they first opened in 1990, the Rubashkins and the Jews they hire commuted by bus from large cities with established Jewish populations. But that became tiresome. So a few years ago, they committed to Postville. They set up a synagogue. They converted a former hospital into a Jewish school. They bought homes. The Jews were quickly pegged as snobby because they didn't eat in the local pizza joint (it wasn't kosher) or greet their neighbors warmly (among the Lubavich, men don't shake hands with women and women don't shake hands with men). They were thought odd because their little boys all have such long hair (by tradition, it can't be cut until age 3) and because the women all wear wigs (they cover their natural hair out of modesty).

In time, however, many grew to love the measured tempo of Postville. Locals began to relax as well.

The newspaper recruited a Jewish woman to write a regular column explaining Hasidic customs. Kids of all religions seem odd because they had long been stagnant. The Jews were quickly pegged as snobby because they didn't eat in the local pizza joint (it wasn't kosher) or greet their neighbors warmly (among the Lubavich, men don't shake hands with women and women don't shake hands with men). They were thought odd because their little boys all have such long hair (by tradition, it can't be cut until age 3) and because the women all wear wigs (they cover their natural hair out of modesty).

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