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Source:  Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News

Publication Date: 05-MAY-04


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For Many in Mexico, Agave Tequila Product Should Be Savored, Sipped.

By Victoria Hirschberg, The Monitor, McAllen, Texas Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News

May 5--Alex Rodriguez, 28, is a self-proclaimed tequila expert.

His family is from Guadalajara, a tequila hub in Mexico. He works at Ferrell's Wine and Liquor in North McAllen and owns an unopened bottle of the coveted Don Porfidio a[+ or -]ejo tequila with the notable glass cactus inside.

Rodriguez doesn't plan to open the bottle any time soon.

But it's more about the taste, he said.

"I just sip it with a chaser," said the McAllen resident.

Usually water.

"That's the best way to drink tequila," he said.

And he doesn't "shoot it" like many unknowing tequila drinkers.

"I want to taste it," he said. "I like to taste my tequila."

There are certain rules that apply when drinking good tequila made of 100 por ciento blue agave. These rules were created in Mexican bars and restaurants; while closing a business deal; on street corners and in big cities and small villages. And tequila isn't just for Cinco de Mayo. It's an everyday thing in Mexico and even the United States.

Drinking tequila is different from enjoying tequila.

It's not a quick shot to ease the burning; it's a tradition that is rooted deep into the Mexican culture. Whether it's May 5 or just any Wednesday, tequila is a Mexican tradition.

Although commonly confused with Mexico's Independence Day (Sept. 16), today marks the defeat of the French by the Mexican Army in 1862 in Puebla. Cinco de Mayo is actually more for Mexican-Americans, said Arturo Salgado, vice consul of the Mexican consulate in McAllen. That doesn't mean people don't celebrate in Mexico, but it is more likely people in the United States will buy a bottle of tequila and celebrate.

"They (Mexican-Americans) wanted to take celebrations that identified them that was different from the 16 of September," he said. "Of course in Mexico it is celebrated but it is not as important as the 16 of September celebration."

But people on either side of the border don't need a reason to drink tequila.