It occurs at the same time of year and bears some other similarities, but Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) is not the same as Halloween.

“Day of the Dead is about remembering loved ones who have passed,” Moab Valley Multicultural Center Program Coordinator Zaida Agreda said. “It is sacred and spiritual. It is an opportunity for families to come together.”
This year, the Moab Valley Multicultural Center (MVMC), located at 156 N. 100 West, will hold its ninth annual Día de los Muertos festival on Sunday, Oct. 27, from 1 to 5 p.m.

The MVMC described the event as “family friendly” and said there will be a kids’ activity tent, the live mariachi band Mariachi Sol de Jalisco, and a spread of traditional foods including tacos, tamales, empanadas, and rice and beans. A plate of food and a drink will cost $13; dessert will be available for $1 more.

The festival is also an opportunity to learn about Día de los Muertos altars, which are memorials set up to honor loved ones who are no longer living. The MVMC said that per some people’s cultural beliefs, it is when spirits return to earth to visit the living.

Agreda said Día de los Muertos is a big, two-day holiday celebration in her country of origin, Bolivia.

“We use a lot of bread, sugar cane, flowers, music, prayers, and the favorite drink and food of the person who passed away,” Agreda said, describing the altars. “The cemeteries in Bolivia are full of people on both days. There is a lot of live music to make these days as festive as possible and to make the afterlife happier.”

Agreda added that her favorite part of the festival is a serenade performed by the mariachi band at the conclusion of the festival, usually after its official end.

“At the end of the Festival, the Mariachi Band sings songs and serenades the makeshift tombs and altars which have been decorated by people in the community who have lost a loved one,” Agreda said. “This is a very sad and happy moment for me. It brings tears not just to me, but to a lot of people who attend the Festival.”

Community members sign up ahead of time to have altars at the festival. This year, one altar is being set up by an organization, local nonprofit the Youth Garden Project. However, this altar is different than the others, as it honors Pachamama—roughly translated as “Mother Earth.”

“We are excited and honored to decorate the Pachamama altar for Día de los Muertos,” said Kaitlin Thomas, the executive director of the Youth Garden Project. “It is fun to participate in this part of the cultural celebration that is connected to Mother Earth and nature, a big part of the Youth Garden Project.”
Thomas said that in addition to the “beautiful decorations” provided by the MVMC, they will use items harvested from their gardens for the altar to “represent the cycles of life and death in nature” such as “plants that have gone to seed, changed colors, or are fall bloomers.”

The MVMC said Día de los Muertos can be traced back to indigenous festivals across the Americas and aligns with the celebration in Western Christianity of All Saints Eve and Day as well as All Souls Day.

“Day of the Dead is a tradition that a lot of countries celebrate, not just Mexico,” said Agreda. “These traditions were first celebrated by the Incas. The Incas called the festivity ‘Aya Marcay Quilla.’ When the Spaniards conquered Latin America it influenced many of their traditions.”

The mission of the MVMC is to “build bridges across language and culture.”

“It is a wonderful nonprofit that does a little bit of everything from crisis intervention, interpretation, advocacy, homelessness prevention, and cultural awareness,” Agreda said. “Everybody is welcome at the MVMC. We accept everyone without question of race, gender, etc.”

For more information, the MVMC can be reached at 435-259-5444.

“Day of the Dead is about remembering loved ones who have passed. It is sacred and spiritual.”

— Zaida Agreda

Family friendly event includes kids’ activities, traditional food

When: Sunday, Oct. 27, from 1 to 5 p.m.

Where: Moab Valley Multicultural Center, 156 N. 100 West

Cost: Free admission; meal prices start at $13

Contact: Phone: 435-259-5444, email: hello@moabmc.org, web page: moabmc.org