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Internationally Acclaimed Poet Luzmaria Espinosa Named as Third Ventura County Poet Laureate by the Ventura County Arts Council

*Espinosa brings decades of art and activism throughout the county and state as an educator
and as part of the Chicana/o Cultural Art Movement*

February 10, 2020 – VENTURA, Calif – The Ventura County Arts Council announced their selection of local resident Luzmaria Espinosa as Ventura County’s third Poet Laureate, a role in which she will serve for two years as the official poet and ambassador to the community for poetry. During her term, she will participate in ceremonial, educational and cultural activities throughout the county, advocating for its local art, diversity and history. Ms. Espinosa will be inaugurated on Saturday, Feb. 22, 2020 at 3:30 p.m. at the Agriculture Museum in Santa Paula with a ceremony followed by a reception. The public is invited and encouraged to attend the inauguration, which has been sponsored in part by the Santa Paula Latino Town Hall.

Luzmaria "Luzma" Espinosa is a poet, a life-long activist, teatrista, danzante and cultural worker. Born in Michoacán, Mexico, she and her family migrated to Ventura County in 1956, and she attended Santa Paula schools. She received BA degrees from UC Santa Barbara in Spanish and Sociology, and she earned an Adult Teaching Credential and MA from Antioch University. She has shared her poetry in K-12 schools, community colleges and community cultural events in Ventura County, Santa Barbara County and San Luis Obispo County, throughout California, Mexico, Nicaragua and Africa. She acknowledges that her inspiration to develop her poetry came from her mentors and friends, fellow activist artists José Montoya, Javier Pacheco and John Trudell.

“We are thrilled that Luzmaria will be representing us and serving our community as the county’s new Poet Laureate,” said Wendy Osher, President of the Board of Directors the Ventura County Arts Council. “She is truly a local treasure and artistic luminary in California and beyond. In addition to her lifetime of work that has impacted many, she continues to create, educate and advocate for her fellow human beings, and we couldn’t be more excited to support her in that mission through her poetry activities.”

Ms. Espinosa has performed in theater productions with the former group, *Los Mascarones* of Mexico City, *Teatro Gusto* of the Mission Cultural Center in San Francisco, *Teatro de la Calle* in Sacramento, and *Teatro In Lak ‘Ech* of Oxnard. She was also a member of *TENAZ (Teatro Nacional de Aztlan)*.

In 1979, she became a member of the Royal Chicano Air Force, a Sacramento, California-based art collective which supported the activities of Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta and helped to advance the cause of the United Farm Workers movement and other marginalized groups. She also began her life’s passion of sharing and teaching Danza Azteca. She is the first person to introduce Danza Mexica/Azteca to the Central Coast of California, where her group has impacted hundreds of lives—particularly youth—throughout Ventura County.

Her archives were recently installed at California State University, Channel Islands (CSUCI) in Ventura County and are a testament to her lifelong commitment to peace and justice.

This exhibition features her rare, never-before-seen art collection, which includes original pieces by members of the Royal Chicano Air Force, such as José Montoya and Estebán Villa, and other Chicana/o artists of the 1970s, such as Magú and more. Her unique collection features well-preserved original documentation of the *Chicano Teatro* movement and her own works of poetry and Danza history. It provides a visual, historical narrative of a rich Chicana/o Cultural Art Movement that includes rare recordings, artifacts, primary sources and decades-long solidarity work with Centro America and beyond. Her collection inserts a Chicana narrative and local context, including from her hometown of Santa Paula.

The position of Poet Laureate is largely voluntary and no tax dollars are spent in the execution of its duties. It is the work, enthusiasm and generosity of a committed community of artists, writers and volunteers, under the leadership of the Ventura County Arts Council, that makes the Ventura County Poet Laureate Program possible. All funding is generated through private contributions and cultural grants. The laureateship has previously been held by local poets Phil Taggart and Mary Kay Rummel.

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About the Ventura County Arts Council

The Ventura County Arts Council (VCAC) advocates for the arts and for increased arts instruction in schools. It fosters community development through the arts, serving county artists, arts organizations and the general public through partnerships with arts supporters, businesses, foundations and community leaders. It embraces and leverages the diversity of Ventura County and strives to reach low income and marginalized communities with programs designed to engage diverse populations.

VCAC was formed and incorporated as an independent 501(c)3 non-profit arts organization in 1997. It has been designated by the Ventura County Board of Supervisors as the local partner of the California Arts Council (CAC), with a mandate to serve the county's citizens in partnership with CAC.

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