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Gov. Blagojevich announces $500,000 for education programs at the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum

Grant will support school tours, youth outreach, art classes and family festivals at the nation’s largest Latino cultural institution

CHICAGO – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today announced $500,000 in funding for educational programs at Chicago’s Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum. The funds will allow the museum to offer more school tours, strengthen its youth outreach programs, offer arts classes to more area schools and continue holding a spring festival that has been attracting thousands of families every year to its Pilsen location.

"The Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum has been a beacon of culture and education for thousands of Latinos in Illinois, helping children and adults stay in touch with their roots and traditions, while also showcasing the best of contemporary Latino art," said Gov. Blagojevich. "With this grant, the Museum will be able to continue its mission and its commitment to revitalize the Pilsen area, using art as a means to educate Illinoisans about the richness and depth of Latino culture."

The $500,000 grant will allow the Museum to continue dedicating 25 percent of its operating budget to education. The funds will support the Museum’s Educational Programs, including:

**School tours:** Over 1,600 school groups visit the Museum each year. The Museum serves over 60,000 students that are representative of all the cultural and ethnic communities in Illinois.

**Radio Arte:** This initiative, the only Latino youth operated radio station in the country, provides training for 200 students a year in all facets of radio production. Radio Arte has received the White House’s "Coming Up Taller Award" and has been recognized by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

**Yolocalli Youth Arts Reach and Arte Ambulante:** These programs allow the Museum to hire artists and art educators to conduct after school painting, music, dance and theatre classes throughout Chicago and several suburban communities.

**Dia del Niño Family Festival:** This festival features a health walk from the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum to the University of Illinois-Chicago’s Pavilion, plus a large number of arts and health activities for children and free health screenings for families. Over 12,000 people attended the 2005 festival, which is the largest celebration in the United States of the Mexican holiday celebrating children.

"The mission of the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum is to preserve knowledge and stimulate appreciation of Mexican culture by sponsoring events and exhibitions that exemplify the rich variety of
visual and performing arts in the Mexican culture; develop a significant permanent collection of Mexican art; encourage the professional development of Mexican artists; and offer arts education programs," said Museum President Carlos Tortolero. "This grant could not have been possible without the staunch support of our Latino Caucus Representatives and Senators and of course our Governor Rod Blagojevich."

Joined by the Museum board of directors and members of the Illinois Latino Legislative Caucus, the Governor made the announcement at an exhibit room dedicated to the memory of Carlos Cortez (1924-2005), considered by arts critics as the greatest Mexican American artist from Chicago in the 20th Century. Printmaker, draftsman, painter, photographer, poet, teacher, laborer and social activist, Cortez was inspired by the German Expressionism and Mexican printmakers to portray social, labor and civil rights issues in his work. Cortez was involved with the Museum since it opened in 1987 and contributed over 300 pieces to the Museum’s Permanent Collection.

"This grant will help the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum reach its goal of preserving and educating the public about Mexican culture," said State Rep. Edward Acevedo (D-Chicago). "With one of the fastest growing Latino populations in the country, Chicago relies on the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum to help local residents stay in touch with their roots, while showing the rest of Chicagoans just how beautiful, rich and vast Mexican culture is."

Located in the heart of the Pilsen neighborhood, one of Chicago’s most vibrant Latino communities, the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum was launched in 1982, when Carlos Tortolero recruited several fellow teachers to form its first board of directors, and opened its doors in 1987, following the Renovation of the Harrison Park Board Craft Shop.

Through the years the Museum, considered the largest Latino cultural institution in the U.S. and the only Latino arts organization in the country with an accreditation from the American Association of Museums, has exhibited the works of leading Mexican and Latino artists, including Carlos Cortez, Francisco Toledo, Maria Izquierdo, Remedios Varo, Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Gunther Gerszo and many others, and has hosted lectures by distinguished intellectuals and leaders such as Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, Cesar Chavez, Elena Poniatowska, former First Lady and current U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham-Clinton, and local writers Sandra Cisneros and Ana Castillo.