

Contacts:

Jill Arnone, San José Mexican Heritage Corporation

408 315 5121 jilla@thearnonegroup.com

Steven Brewster, City of San José Office of Economic Development

408 535 8168 steven.brewster@sanjoseca.gov

Christin Chism, Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service

202 633 3159

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Mexican Heritage Corporation Opens Bracero Exhibit: “Bittersweet Harvest: The Bracero Program 1942 – 1964”

San José, CA - February 23, 2010 - The Galeria at Mexican Heritage Plaza will host “Bittersweet Harvest: The Bracero Program, 1942 – 1964,” an exhibition that will run through Saturday, May 2, in partnership with the Smithsonian Institute Traveling Exhibition (SITES).

“This is a wonderful opportunity to pay tribute to the bracero experience that is part of the Latino heritage of the valley,” said Marcela Davison Aviles, President and CEO of the Mexican Heritage Corporation.

In 1943, President Roosevelt announced the creation of what would become the largest Mexican guest-worker program in U.S. history. “*Bittersweet Harvest: The Bracero Program, 1942-1964*,” is a new bilingual (English/Spanish) exhibition stopping in San José and other museums around the country, on a two-year multi-city tour.

Facing labor shortages on the home front during World War II, the United States initiated a series of agreements with Mexico to recruit Mexican men to work on American farms and railroads. The Emergency Farm Labor Program, more familiarly known as the Bracero Program, enabled approximately 2 million Mexicans to enter the United States and work on short-term labor contracts.

San José Councilmember Nora Campos is hosting the Exhibition Opening Reception, an event open to the public. The Exhibition Opening Reception will be on Monday, March 8, 2010 at 6 p.m.

“This exhibit gives us the opportunity to reflect upon the struggles braceros’ endured in the United States during this time period,” said Councilmember Nora Campos. “I hope it will remind us all that, despite the progress we have made as a nation, there is still much work to be done to increase human rights for all workers.”

The exhibition explores the braceros’ contributions to communities in Mexico and the United States, the opportunities that became available to braceros and the challenges that they faced as guest workers during the war years and afterward. Included in the exhibition are 15 free-standing

banners featuring oral histories, quotes and photographs by Leonard Nadel, a photographer who, in 1956, exposed employer violations endured by many braceros. The Nadel photos inspired the museum's work on "Bittersweet Harvest and the Bracero History Project, which also includes audio clips of former braceros relating their experiences. The firsthand accounts were collected as part of the project's oral-history initiative.

Alcario and Carmen Castellano expressed their excitement saying, "We consider this prestigious exhibition to be an important opportunity to educate visitors on a significant period in U.S. and Mexican history and the farm worker experience. We are proud that a number of oral testimonies collected for this exhibition by Smithsonian Institution researchers are personal accounts told by former braceros living in San Jose. This exhibition relates the stories of these Mexican workers who harvested the fields of this Valley, many of whom settled here and raised their families. Their story is our story, so it is with great pleasure that we honor the braceros and their families."

Mexican Heritage Corporation is presenting Bittersweet Harvest as part of a series of cultural events celebrating the 200th anniversary of Mexico's independence in 2010. For more information about this cultural series visit the Bicentennial website at www.sjmexico2010.com

The exhibit is sponsored locally by the Castellano Family Foundation, in part by a cultural Affairs grant from the City of San José, and includes artifacts from the collection and archives of History San José.

"SITES is deeply gratified to share with the nation a central part of American labor history of which so few are aware," said Anna Cohn, director of SITES. "The story of the bracero is rooted in hope and determination. It is a testament to the enduring contributions that Mexicans and Mexican Americans have made to American life."

Accompanying the exhibition is a website with transcripts, audio files of all of the oral histories, photos, essays, bibliographies and teaching resources. Developed by the Center for New Media at George Mason University, the website features a section where braceros and their families can contribute their own stories. The website is located at www.braceroarchive.org

"Bittersweet Harvest" is organized by the National Museum of American History and organized for travel by SITES. Funding is made possible through the Smithsonian's Latino Center, which celebrates Latino culture, spirit and achievement in America by facilitating the development of exhibitions, research, collections and education programs. For more information, visit www.latino.si.edu

The National Museum of American History collects preserves and display American heritage in the areas of social, political, cultural, scientific and military history. After a two-year renovation and a dramatic transformation, the museum shines new light on American history, both in Washington and online. To learn more about the museum, check www.americanhistory.si.edu. For Smithsonian information, the public may call (202) 633-1000, (202) 633-5285.

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About the Mexican Heritage Corporation

With a mission to affirm, celebrate and preserve the rich cultural heritage of the Mexican community and showcase multicultural arts within the region and nationally, MHC both presents and produces a vibrant array of multi-disciplinary arts programs in theatre, dance, and music education and in the visual arts. To learn more about the San Jose Mariachi and Mexican Heritage Festival, and MHC visit www.sjmariachifestival.org and www.mhcviva.org

About SITES

SITES has been sharing the wealth of Smithsonian collections and research programs with millions of people outside Washington, D.C., for more than 50 years. SITES connects Americans to their shared cultural heritage through a wide range of exhibitions about art, science and history, which are shown wherever people live, work and play. Exhibition descriptions and tour schedules are available at www.sites.si.edu

About the City of San Jose

From its founding in 1777 as California's first city, San Jose has been a leader, driven by its spirit of innovation. Today, San Jose stands as the largest city in Northern California and the Capital of Silicon Valley. The city, the 10th largest in the U.S., is committed to remaining a top-ranked place to do business, to work and to live. For more information, visit, www.sanjoseca.gov.