

Día de los Muertos returns to Art Center East

LA GRANDE — Art Center East's second annual Día de los Muertos / Day of the Dead exhibit and community celebration will open Nov. 1. The exhibit features artwork created by K-12 classrooms throughout Union County inspired by Mexican folk-art traditions associated with Día de los Muertos.

The public is invited to attend the family-friendly community celebration from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. next Friday and visit the exhibit during gallery hours Nov. 1-11. Both the exhibit and celebration are free admission.

Día de los Muertos is a Mexican national holiday recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage. Despite its name — and imagery that evokes skulls and skeletons — Día de los Muertos celebrates the joys of life and offers an annual opportunity to honor loved ones who have passed. Its tone is playful and light, and its traditions highlight the importance of family, both living and dead.

"We held our first Día de los Muertos exhibit and celebration in 2018 in order to invite the community to interact with our gallery space in a meaningful way that is different from that of a traditional gallery exhibit," said Sarah West, Art Center East community outreach coordinator. "The exhibit and event were both a huge success and we're looking forward to expanding

it with new partnerships this year."

One of those partnerships is with Latino Impact, an EOU student group focused on highlighting Latino culture, which will run the event's face painting station. ACE received funding from the Union County Safe Communities Coalition Youth Council to offer a free screening of Pixar's "Coco" at 6:30 p.m. Also, a grant from the Union County Cultural Coalition will subsidize the cost of tamales sold at the event. The \$1 tamales will again be made by La Fiesta, a family-owned restaurant based in La Grande. The celebration will also include art-making stations and a dress-up photo booth.

This year's exhibit will double the number of participating classrooms whose artwork is on display, drawing from the North Powder, La Grande, Island City, Union, Elgin and Imbler school districts. ACE provides an optional curriculum guide, though the art projects were facilitated entirely by classroom teachers. The exhibit celebrates Día de los Muertos folk-art traditions and Mexican cultural themes while at the same time highlighting ACE's mission to encourage and expand access to the arts across Northeast Oregon.

One of the most popular elements of the exhibit last year was



Community members are invited to bring photos or mementos of loved ones who have passed for the ofrenda. The ofrenda from last year's inaugural Day of the Dead exhibit at ACE is shown here.

the ofrenda, a place to leave photos, notes or other mementos for loved ones who have passed.

"Last year's ofrenda was completely covered with pictures and notes by the end of the exhibit's run," West said. "I was particularly moved by the way it offered a safe space for public grieving, which isn't something we have many avenues to express or witness."

Community members are invited to bring items for this year's ofrenda beginning Oct. 29. A secondary free event called The Lost Table will offer community members a chance to share stories about their lost loved ones. This event will run

from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Nov. 2.

The Nov. 1 celebration will include the second of four drawings

in Art Center East's ongoing Raffle Extravaganza. Proceeds support free community programming.



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