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December 19, 2023

Board of Supervisors  
County of Ventura  
800 South Victoria Avenue  
Ventura, CA 93009

**SUBJECT:** Receive and File an Update Summarizing the County of Ventura's 150th Anniversary Celebration Events and Programs.

**BACKGROUND:**

The year 2023 marks the 150th anniversary of the establishment of the County of Ventura. On March 28, 2023, your Board received and filed an update on the County of Ventura's 150th Anniversary Celebration plans, including many events, ways the community could get involved, and the launch of the dedicated website for the campaign. That update represented the start of an almost year-long campaign to celebrate, honor, and reflect on the formation of the County of Ventura as the place we call "home" for hundreds of thousands of people and families.

Today, this update and presentation will summarize what was accomplished during the 150th Anniversary Celebration, which included people, artists, culture bearers, storytellers, filmmakers, authors, historians, philanthropists, photographers, teachers, and many others sharing their perspectives on the history of this great county that we call home.

This summary recaps the events of the 150th Anniversary Campaign and acknowledges the numerous people and organizations that made these events possible.

**DISCUSSION:**

The 150th Anniversary Celebration was a tremendous undertaking. It included commissioning and installing (at multiple locations) a special museum exhibit, a music festival and community event, pop-up events in all five supervisorial districts, an extensive series of community-based programs, and much more.

The County partnered with the Museum of Ventura County (MVC) to implement most of the extensive program. The MVC should be commended for its thoughtful consideration to engage an array of artists, culture bearers, and storytellers to deliver superior quality programs. MVC delivered these events in a sensitive, inclusive, diverse fashion, and of the highest standards for our residents. Most artists who participated were compensated through a robust fundraising campaign implemented by the MVC. The MVC was able to

engage philanthropists, foundations, and the business community to raise more than \$800,000 toward the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration activities and the County's State of the County event. In addition, the MVC worked with dozens of agencies, service organizations, and volunteers to provide vital in-kind support that enabled the MVC to reach thousands of residents with the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary message. The County is grateful for the MVC partnership and their whole-hearted commitment to serving the community and placing considerable resources of staff time and funds to deliver an exceptional program that aptly commemorates the significant milestone of a sesquicentennial anniversary.

The following summary provides an overview of the scope of activities and the community partnerships that made the events possible. It is important to note that so many organizations participated that it was necessary to attach four exhibits to this board letter to recognize all of them.

With that said, there are some key partners whose contributions were critical to the success of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration. It would behoove the County to specially recognize the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary co-presenting sponsors, top "innovation" sponsors, and the City of Santa Paula for their exceptional donations toward the implementation of all the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary activities.

The co-presenting sponsors were the Museum of Ventura County as the lead organization and beneficiary, followed by the Economic Development Corporation, Ventura County Community Foundation, and the Pacific Coast Business Times. These partners collectively led the effort to plan and fundraise for the celebration.

The top "innovation" sponsors included: City of Santa Paula, City of Simi Valley, California Humanities, TOLD Corporation, Harrison Industries, Limoneira, Meissner, The Port of Hueneme, Ventura County Credit Union, and Ventura County Community College District. These top contributors' investments ensured the programming at the music festival, community events, museum exhibits, and State of the County was affordable or free to all residents. Their contributions also provided much-needed funding for artists, culture bearers, and nonprofit organizations to pay for expenses incurred for the delivery of their art and services.

The County of Ventura is grateful to the City of Santa Paula for hosting the flagship event, the Mountains to the Sea Jubilee and Music Festival. The city demonstrated exceptional leadership and innovative problem-solving in accepting the role of host city for the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary main event. City staff from the Community/Economic Development, Parks and Recreation, and Public Works, along with the Police Department, worked lockstep with the MVC and the County to ensure a safe and family-friendly event for the entire county to enjoy. The sheer number of Santa Paula-based community organizations that volunteered to help with the logistics of hosting this event was impressive. Santa Paula's historic downtown charm was on full display. Guests enjoyed Santa Paula's hospitality down to the street banners welcoming every city by name.

The County's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration and all associated events would not have been possible without the tremendous contributions of the Museum of Ventura County, the City of Santa Paula, and each of these sponsors. We are extremely fortunate to have such dedicated partners in our county, and very grateful for their hard work, dedication and commitment in ensuring a celebratory, meaningful, and successful sesquicentennial year.

The following is a summary of the events that comprised the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.

### **“The Place We Call Home” Exhibit**

Unveiled at the Agriculture Museum in Santa Paula on October 21, 2023, “The Place We Call Home” was a special exhibit curated and produced by the MVC to portray a tapestry of shared experiences and individual stories while exploring the meaning of ‘home’ through the lens of our diverse communities. Using both historical and contemporary photographs, it explores the lives of people connected to Ventura County and their relationship to nature, the land, and each other. The historical photos were primarily from the Museum’s Library and Archives Collection; however, photos from various county historical societies were also included. Three satellite exhibits were installed, one at the Bank of America Performing Arts Center Thousand Oaks, another at Oxnard College’s Condor Hall, and a third at the Simi Valley Community Center.

MVC Chief Curator was *Carlos Ortega*. Participating scholars included Dr. Colleen Marie Delaney, Department of Anthropology, California State University Channel Islands; Dr. Herbert Gooch, Professor of Political Science, California Lutheran University; and Dr. Frank Barajas, Professor of History, California State University Channel Islands.

Contemporary photographs were created by a diverse group of Ventura County artists. The contemporary photographers and artists who contributed to the exhibition were: *Ben Bribriesca, Cristian Castro, Jorge Corralejo, Blake Fagan, Leah Mata Fragua, Porfirio Gutierrez, MB Hanrahan, Oliver Krisch, Trinh Mai, Cris Mejia, Amy Oliver, Liisa Pynnonen, Zaydee Sanchez, George Sandoval, and Amadeo Sumano.*

A full listing of artists, individuals, and organizations that contributed to “The Place We Call Home” is available in Exhibit 1 included with this letter.

### **Mountains to the Sea Jubilee and Music Festival**

On October 21, 2023, in historic downtown Santa Paula, the MVC produced a family-friendly celebration and music festival. More than an estimated 3,500 people attended. The Jubilee event was free to attend and included:

- Kids’ Zone with games, crafts, storytelling, and other activities organized by a long list of community organizations, artists and cultural bearers.
- Musical and cultural arts performances.
- Food trucks and vendors.

- Historical walking tours featuring historically significant architecture, public art displays, and storytelling.
- The Mobile Library Team was a part of the Kids Free Zone.

Historic downtown Santa Paula was the ideal backdrop for the event. It is Ventura County's 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest city, is deep-rooted in agricultural history, and boasts a vibrant downtown. The City of Santa Paula closely collaborated with the MVC, County, and other organizers, including the Santa Paula Chamber of Commerce and Totally Local VC. The City's Santa Paula Proud volunteer program coordinated the Santa Paula Beautiful Clean Up Day one week before the Jubilee festivities. More than 150 volunteers showed up, more than double the usual attendance, to spruce up the locations where the 150<sup>th</sup> celebrations would occur. This included painting benches, curbs, and public facilities, pulling weeds, cleaning trash, and removing graffiti.

Preparations to host the County's anniversary event also included the City unveiling the *Bursting with Color: Downtown Banner Celebration*, an exciting project aimed to engage and showcase the artistic talents of Santa Paula artists, young and old, to express themselves, foster creativity, and celebrate the cultural heritage of the community. A total of 82 light pole banners displayed 150th-themed artwork along the historic Main Street, transforming the public spaces into an open-air gallery.

The Jubilee community event was immediately followed by a Music Festival featuring artists with ties to Ventura County. The MVC offered \$20 tickets for an impressive lineup of artists, including:

- Big Bad Voodoo Daddy
- Rey Fresco
- Charles Law Band
- Mariachi Camarillo
- Whiskey Business
- Kelly Zirbes (singing the National Anthem)

Behind the scenes, the Santa Paula High School music department's students helped do "roadie and stage crew" work for the show. Students taking the stage management course at Santa Paula High School experienced firsthand what it takes to put on a large-scale music production. The students' excitement for this hands-on experience was evident.

Other organizations that assisted during these events included:

- Santa Paula Downtown Improvement District created sidewalk sale promotions for downtown businesses.
- Santa Paula Historical Society led historical walking tours for the public.

- Santa Paula Theater Center opened for tours and activities.
- Santa Paula Soroptimist Club assisted with parking.
- Santa Paula FFA operated the pumpkin patch.
- Santa Paula Color Guard performed the Posting of the Colors.

A full list of participating organizations is available in Exhibit 2.

### **Pop-Up Presentations and Community Grants for Programming**

The MVC coordinated four pop-up events. Each pop-up event featured a specially branded tent and included programming from various community organizations. The MVC administered a grant program to support these activities. Of the 100 organizations that applied, 54 proposals were awarded, totaling \$40,000 in grants. A full list of mini-grant proposals that were funded is available in Exhibit 3.

### **State of the County 2023**

The annual State of the County commemorated the 150th Anniversary Celebration. It was a sold-out event held on November 2 at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum with an estimated 550 people in attendance. The event opened with the singing of the National Anthem by 4<sup>th</sup> grader and Simi ARTS participant Reese Lovenson. After welcoming remarks by the Chair of the Board Supervisor Matt LaVere, CEO Dr. Johnson delivered an inspiring and insightful overview of key County initiatives in three focus areas: healthy and safe communities; economic vitality; and housing and homelessness. Following the presentation was a hosted reception in the Air Force One Pavilion. Entertainment was provided by Toni Jonnatta Jazz Trio, California Lutheran University Kingsmen and Regal Quartets, Aaron O'Brien magician, Julianne Sillona vocalist, and DJ Phenixx, a Ventura resident.

### **Other events and initiatives included:**

1. Kickoff Event – The official 150th-anniversary launch party took place at the MVC in Ventura, featuring the opening of three new exhibits, speakers, regional musicians, performances, food trucks, and more. 930 people attended.
2. VC Memories – A community-driven photo archive project aiming to celebrate and preserve cherished memories of Ventura County residents. Photos will be displayed and archived at the MVC.
3. Feast or Flop TV – A show uncovering unique regional recipes in partnership with local chefs.
4. Oral Histories Come to Life – Selected MVC oral histories are now available online, accompanied by a guide on capturing personal oral histories.
5. Commemorative Photo Book – A magazine-style publication by Pacific Coast Business Times showcasing Ventura County's history and future through diverse contributions.

6. Library Events – Author talks, local history speakers, film screenings, and live performances were coordinated throughout the year.
7. Independent projects – Funded by the MVC grants program, ten artists and organizations presented or produced projects that reflected the County's rich history.

### **California Humanities Funded Community Partner Programs**

County of Ventura's Office of Arts and Culture was honored to be a recipient of a \$25,000 *Humanities for All* grant from California Humanities, a non-profit partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. This grant supported programs and projects connected to the County's 150th Anniversary events, including:

- *The Legends of Nardcore: 40 Years of Punk Rock in Ventura County – Panel Discussion*, presented by the Oxnard Performing Arts Center, Oct. 13 in Oxnard.
- *The Asian American Experience in Ventura County*, by Dr. Lily Anne Welty-Tamai, California State University Channel Islands, Oct. 25 in Camarillo.
- "The Ramona Story: Film Screening and Discussion," at Rancho Camulos Museum, Oct. 28, in Piru.
- *History is Now Photography Exhibit* curated by Focus on the Masters, at the Atrium Gallery inside the Hall of Administration and the Thousand Oaks Bank of America Performing Arts Center
- *El Bracero: A Mariachi Opera* at the Fillmore Town Theatre, presented by the ANIMO Theatre Company, Nov. 10, in Fillmore.
- "Saging the World Film Screening and Know We Are Here Pannel," at the Chumash Indian Museum, Nov. 12 in Thousand Oaks.
- "Finding Our Voices – Youth Artist Showcase " at the Simi Valley Cultural Arts Center, Nov. 1, in Simi Valley.

Other 150th Anniversary events supported by the *Humanities for All Grant* include youth poetry workshops hosted by Ventura County Poet Laureate Luz Maria Espinosa and Youth Poet Laureate Angelina Leaños, and pop-up events to celebrate the opening of the 150th Anniversary commemorative exhibit: *Ventura County the Place We Call Home*.

### **Ventura County Library Programs**

A series of 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary events were coordinated by our Ventura County Library. These events included:

- **Film screening, *Mariposas del Campo***, a film by Robin Rosenthal and Bill Yahraus that tells the stories of indigenous Mixtec, Zapotec, and Purépecha teenagers from Mexico striving to change their families' destinies in the strawberry

fields of Oxnard, California. *Date: Saturday, August 12, 2023; Albert H. Soliz Library*

- **Living history performances** with Connie Korenstein. These informal and fun performances cast Ms. Korenstein as iconic women of Ventura County's past, including Mrs. E.P. Foster of Ventura, Miriam Knox Dudley of Ventura, and Lucy Levy of Port Hueneme. These programs delved through a rich history of farming, the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, and the journey of one woman from Parisian socialite to rural Ventura County. *Dates: Saturday, September 2, 2023; E.P. Foster Library; Sunday, October 22, 2023; Hill Road Library; Saturday, December 2, 2023; Ray D. Prueter Library*
- **One County, One Book selection, *Solito*** -- The Ventura County Celebration of Books included a conversation with Javier Zamora, the author of the Ventura County Library's 2023 One County, One Book selection *Solito*. From the official description, "*Solito* not only provides an immediate and intimate account of a treacherous and near-impossible journey, but also the miraculous kindness and love delivered at the most unexpected moments. *Solito* is Javier's story, but it's also the story of millions of others who had no choice but to leave home." *Date: Saturday, September 30, 2023; CSUCI*
- **Young People's Poetry Workshop** --The Hill Road Library hosted a poetry workshop on October 23rd with Angelina Leaños, 2021-2022 Ventura County Youth Poet Laureate. Angelina said, "The goal of these workshops is to curate poems celebrating the county - whether it's someone's experiences growing up here, what they love about the county, etc." *Date: Monday, October 23, 2023; Hill Road Library*
- **Author Talk** -- The Ventura Friends of the Library invited the public to meet the author of *A Lovely Girl: The Tragedy of Olga Duncan and the Trial of One of California's Most Notorious Killers*. Deborah Holt Larkin was ten years old when her father, the court reporter for the Ventura County Star-Free Press, was immersed in the trial of Olga Duncan's killers taking place at the Ventura County Courthouse (now Ventura City Hall). Larkin's memoir tells the story of this stranger-than-fiction murder case and the influence of her reporter father's work in her early life. Her book was available for sale, and her talk was followed by a book signing. The event was free and open to the public, with more than 100 attendees. *Date: Saturday, November 4, 2023; Ventura City Hall*
- A public exhibit featuring the history of the E.P. Foster Library was on display at the E.P. Foster Library throughout 2023.

The County created the website, [www.VenturaCounty150.com](http://www.VenturaCounty150.com), to serve as a hub for online information regarding the 150th Anniversary Celebration, including event details, volunteer opportunities, event organizer resources, and instructions for the VC 150

Memories project. A robust advertising campaign included print and digital ads and social media to encourage the community to participate in event programs.

The MVC raised a total of \$837,500 through in-kind, grant, organizational, and individual contributions. The MVC was the primary beneficiary and primarily responsible for the expenses of the campaign. A complete list of sponsors is available in Exhibit 4.

In conclusion, Ventura County's 150th Anniversary Celebration is a milestone event that brought together our diverse community to commemorate our collective achievements and history. This once-in-a-lifetime occasion offered a chance for reflection, inspiring pride and unity among Ventura County residents.

This letter has been reviewed by the County Executive Office and County Counsel. If you have any questions, please contact Gloria Martinez, Economic Vitality Manager at 805-654-2272.

Sincerely,



Gloria E. Martinez  
Economic Vitality Manager



Dr. Sevet Johnson  
County Executive Officer

**Attachments:**

- Exhibit 1 - Place to Call Home Contributors
- Exhibit 2 - SP Jubilee Contributors
- Exhibit 3 - Community Grants Summary
- Exhibit 4 - Sponsors
- Exhibit 5 - Proclamation for Museum of Ventura County
- Exhibit 6 - Proclamation for City of Santa Paula