



County of Monterey

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS RESOLUTION

Resolution No.: 25-187

Adopt Resolution Honoring “The Father of Chicano Theater” Luis Valdez for His)

Lifetime Achievements Promoting Chicano Film, Theater, Literature and Activism...)

WHEREAS, Luis Valdez is a filmmaker, actor, author, and is regarded as one of the most important and influential American playwrights living today and a pioneer in the Chicano and Farmworker Rights Movements. His internationally renowned and Obie award-winning theater company, El Teatro Campesino, was founded by Valdez in 1965 – in the heat of the United Farm Workers (UFW) struggle and the Great Delano Grape Strike in California’s Central Valley; and

WHEREAS, Luis Valdez was born on June 26, 1940, in Delano, California to Mexican migrant farmworker parents, Armeda and Francisco Valdez. He was the second of 10 children in his family and began working in the agricultural fields at 6 years old. His family moved frequently following the harvest throughout California, but his family eventually settled in San Jose; and

WHEREAS, Luis Valdez graduated from James Lick High School in San Jose and graduated from San Jose State University with a major in English. While attending college, he won a playwriting contest and his first full-length play, The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa, was produced by the drama department and debuted at San Jose State in 1963; and

WHEREAS, Luis Valdez returned to his hometown of Delano in 1965, where he enlisted in labor leader Cesar Chavez’s mission to organize farmworkers into a comprehensive labor union. Valdez brought together farmworkers, students and other activists to form El Teatro Campesino, a first-of-its-kind farmworker theater troupe; and

WHEREAS, El Teatro Campesino was known for touring migrant camps with their *actos*, one-act plays, which were usually around fifteen minutes long. The plays were used to educate and inform not only the farmworkers, but also the public. Valdez believed that humor was a major asset to his plays in El Teatro Campesino as it was a tool to uplift the morale of strikers. Social and political commentary were intertwined within the humor to accomplish the goals of El Teatro Campesino. Original plays of El Teatro were based on the experiences of farmworkers, but by 1967, their subject matter expanded to other aspects of Chicano culture; and

WHEREAS, In 1967, Luis Valdez established a Chicano cultural center in Del Rey, California. In 1969, he moved both the theater and cultural center to Fresno, where they remained for two years. While in Fresno, Valdez taught at Fresno State University and created TENAZ, the national Chicano theater organization, which was composed of many with theatre groups throughout the Southwest; and

WHEREAS, Luis Valdez moved the theater a final time in 1971 to San Juan Bautista in San Benito County. Combined now with the cultural center, it became a fully professional production company; and

WHEREAS, Luis Valdez was the first Chicano director to produce a successful play, *Zoot Suit* in 1978, that later became a movie in 1981. The real-life story plot was about the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial when a group of young Mexican-Americans were wrongfully charged with murder and the Zoot Suit riots of the 1940s. It was Valdez’s first work that brought him attention to larger audiences at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles for 46 weeks to more than 40,000 attendees, and the play was later presented on Broadway in 1979; and

WHEREAS, Luis Valdez also directed and produced the movie *La Bamba* that debuted in 1987 about the first iconic 1950’s Chicano rock star Ritchie Valens and his tragic death with other music legends Buddy Holly and the Big Bopper; and

WHEREAS, Luis Valdez’ hard work and long creative career have won him countless awards including numerous Golden Globe nominations for Best Motion Picture in a Musical or Comedy (*Zoot Suit*) and Best Motion Picture for a Drama (*La Bamba*), the prestigious Peabody Award for Excellence in Television 1987, LA Drama Critic Awards, Dramalogue Awards, Bay Area Critics Awards, 1990 Governor’s Award from the California Arts Council, 2007 Rockefeller Fellow, 1992 Hispanic Heritage Award in Literature, and Mexico’s prestigious 1994 Aguila Azteca Award given to individuals whose work promotes cultural excellence and exchange between US and Mexico. In 2016, President Barack Obama awarded him the National Medal of the Arts at the White House; and

WHEREAS, Luis Valdez is today known as “The Father of Chicano Theater” and is respected, admired and loved by the Chicano Latino community and Americans across our nation for his lifetime of activism and his many plays, films, books and other scholarly and artistic works throughout his highly successful career; and

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the County of Monterey Board of Supervisors, on behalf of the County and all residents thereof, hereby honors “The Father of Chicano Theater” Luis Valdez for his lifetime achievements promoting Chicano film, theater, literature and activism in the Chicano and Farmworker Rights Movements. His powerful story that began with humble beginnings in Delano and later reached the greatest achievements in film, literature and the performing arts serves as a true inspiration for our youth and families across the Monterey Bay region and across our nation. Luis Valdez has truly lived the words, “Si Se Puede!”

PASSED AND ADOPTED on this 10th day of June 2025

Chair Supervisor Chris Lopez

Vice Chair Supervisor Wendy Root Askew

Supervisor Glenn Church

Supervisor Luis A. Alejo

Supervisor Kate Daniels

