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TAMIU honors alums: 40 extraordinary contributions named

By KIRSTEN CROW, LAREDO MORNING TIMES

As TAMIU prepares for the arrival of an exhibition that showcases 25 Latinos who have made extraordinary contributions nationally, university officials ensured that local heroes who have impacted Laredo’s fabric of life were not forgotten. Texas A&M International University officials honored nearly 40 alumni Tuesday afternoon for significant work in Laredo and the surrounding areas, inviting recipients to participate in a localized supplementary exhibit to run in the student center adjacent to Smithsonian Museum’s traveling exhibition.

Portraits of the honorees — which include Laredo Police Chief Agustin Dovalina III; Webb County Sheriff Rick Flores; Port Director Gene Garza, U.S. Customs and Border Protection; Webb County Commissioner Jerry Garza; City of Laredo Building Director Erasmo Villarreal; and KGNS anchor Adriana Areé — have been taken with the intent of hanging the photographs, and the biographies of the individuals, in an exhibit titled: “Picture Our Lives — Portraits of TAMIU Alumni Achievements.”

Dan Jones, TAMIU vice president of academic affairs and university provost, said he hopes students will view the exhibition and “see their future.”

The local exhibit will complement TAMIU hosting the Smithsonian Latino Center’s traveling exhibit, “Our Journeys/Our Stories: Portraits of Latino Achievement,” which displays photographs and stories of Latinos who have made notable marks throughout the country, such as labor leader Dolores Huerta, New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson, National Council of La Raza leader Raul Yzaguirre and journalist John Quiñones.

Supported by the Ford Motor Company Fund, the exhibition also includes oral histories and dichos as a background to famous Latinos, as well as the more obscure honorees.

Evelyn Figueroa, project director of the Smithsonian traveling exhibition service, said the exhibition is unique in that it presents an “anthology of personalities of Latinos” that span topics such as immigration, ethnicity, education, value system and cultural identity. The dichos, in particular, are an important aspect, she said.

“It was the way the elders passed on knowledge and wisdom,” Figueroa said.

She praised the partnership forged between Ford Motor Company, Smithsonian and TAMIU, and added that the exhibit has mass appeal that can speak to anyone, regardless of race or ethnicity.

“Even when it’s about Latino culture, the issue it presents applies to everyone in the country,” Figueroa said. “They will see themselves in (the exhibit.) It is good for the community to reflect on the contributions of Latinos.”

During the exhibition, TAMIU will also present a number of activities and events to coincide with its subject matter, including a focus on Latino literary achievements at the Killam Library Special Collections and Archives, speakers, public school tours of the exhibition, class projects, the Voices in the Monte Writers Series Lecture and Workshop, the Bilingual/Biliterate/Bicultural 5th annual conference and a series of Latin American country exhibits.

Ray Keck, TAMIU president, said he was excited about the exhibition, adding that by placing it in the student center — the hub of student activity — nearly all the students will view it.

The exhibition will be available to the public in the TAMIU Student Center Rotunda from March 1 through May 12, and admission is free.

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