



DATE: August 14, 2019

MEMO TO: Nels Leutwiler, Chair
Preservation Foundation Board

FROM: Nan Buckardt
Director of Education

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend approval of a \$11,579 grant to provide partial support for development of the “Celebration of Souls” exhibition at the Bess Bower Dunn Museum and to assist in engaging the Latinx community in Lake County.

FINANCIAL DATA: Funding in the amount of \$6,500 will be released from the Bess Bower Dunn Museum restricted fund, and \$5,079 will be released from unrestricted funds. As of June 30, 2019, the former had a balance of \$52,000 and the latter had a balance of \$249,647.

BACKGROUND: “A Celebration of Souls: Day of the Dead in Southern Mexico” is a national touring photography exhibition curated by the Field Museum. The exhibition will be on display in the Dunn Museum special exhibition gallery from September 28, 2019 through January 5, 2020.

Successful special exhibitions help fulfill the Museum’s mission by “...provid(ing) captivating educational experiences for the benefit of every Lake County resident” while exposing new visitors to the Museum’s permanent collections and galleries. The Celebration of Souls exhibition will help to connect the museum with Lake County’s Latinx population, the second largest and fastest growing population in Lake County according to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Census and American Community Survey.

The Celebration of Souls exhibition features 26 framed color photographs that examines the complex and rich histories of honoring the dead in ancient Mesoamerica, the labor of love involved in these diverse rituals, and the spiritual importance of this holiday in rural Mexico today. The exhibition includes bilingual interpretive labels, and will be installed in an interactive environment created by the Dunn Museum’s exhibitions staff.

To create a rich and authentic exhibition gallery, staff have consulted with community members on the design of a variety of exhibit elements to help bring the photographs to life including: larger than life catrina figures that will be positioned throughout the museum and gallery, a crypt wall that will encourage community members to leave stories and ofrendas (gifts) for their deceased family members, and a documentary movie that brings the sights and sounds of Oaxaca, Mexico into the gallery.

Project Components

The proposed project has two components. First, staff would like to contract out the creation of an original triptych as a complement to the exhibition. A triptych is a series of three original paintings, which in this case will depict a “muertito” party set in Lake County. The paintings would be installed as one continuous mural at the entrance to the gallery and would feature

important historical figures from Lake County’s past (think: Jack Benny as the band leader, Bess Bower Dunn making a grand entrance, etc...) set in a historic Lake County ballroom. All of the individuals and locations in the paintings would be based on staff recommendations and historic photographs from the Dunn Museum archives.

For this project staff have selected artist Robert Valadez, a Latino artist from Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood who specializes in murals and portraits. Mr. Valadez’s style is inspired by the work of Jose Guadalupe Posada, whose work around the Day of the Dead is familiar and well-known throughout the fine art community. Mr. Valadez graduated from Benito Juarez High School, and studied at both the Art Institute of Chicago and the American Academy of Art. Staff have discussed the project with Mr. Valadez, and he is available and excited to produce the piece. He has also agreed to let staff reproduce the images on store merchandise.

The second component of this project relates to engaging the Latinx community in Lake County. During the early planning phase for the exhibition, staff discussed how the Latinx community is under-represented in the museum’s collections. We see this exhibition as an opportunity to reach into Lake County’s Latinx community and develop new relationships to help build this part of the collection, while also driving attendance to this exhibition. Our goal is to gather stories and photographs of families who have moved here; to help us better understand their journey to Lake County and the life they created here. This includes exploring their roots in another country, when and why they came to Lake County, what they left behind, and traditions new and old that they celebrate.

In order to achieve this staff has reached out to Professor Theresa Ruiz-Velasco in the Latin-American studies program at the College of Lake County (“CLC”). Professor Ruiz-Velasco is head of CLC’s Latino Alliance Club (students) and the Latino Outreach Committee (faculty). CLC students and faculty are excited to work with museum staff to help gather these stories for preservation in the Dunn Museum’s permanent collection.

Project Costs

\$6,500.00 – Triptych commission: Artist Robert Valadez

\$4,500.00 – Latinx community engagement initiative

\$579 – Grant administration fee

Sponsorship Benefits

As a sponsor of the Celebration of Souls exhibition the Preservation Foundation’s logo will be prominently positioned in the gallery and on all relevant promotions for the exhibition. In addition, the Foundation Board would be invited to an event in December to celebrate the collaborative work of museum staff and CLC faculty and students on the Latinx community engagement project, and those families who participated in the project and whose stories will help to better represent Lake County’s Latinx community in the museum’s archives.

REVIEW BY OTHERS: Chief Development Officer

PRESERVATION FOUNDATION BOARD:

Date: _____ Roll Call Vote: Ayes: ____ Nays: _____

Voice Vote Majority Ayes; Nays: _____