

New Latinx Murals Unveiled at Holyoke Community College by MANUEL FRAU RAMOS

On October 4, 2023, the recently appointed president of Holyoke Community College (HCC) George Timmons and muralist artist Betsy Casañas, along with HCC faculty, staff, and students officially held a mural ribbon-cutting celebration to unveil three new murals featuring Latinx themes.

All three murals were painted by muralist Betsy Casañas in collaboration with the city of Holyoke and the nonprofit Beyond Walls project. Even though the murals had been completed during the summer, the official unveiling was set for October 4 as part of the National Hispanic Heritage Month that annually is celebrated from September 15 to October 15.

This outstanding event came seventeen years (May 10, 2006) after 'Transformation', the 40-foot long canvas mural of the Latino Mural Collaborative Project worked under the direction of author and painter Deborah Savage was unveiled at HCC campus.

The event was part of HCC's celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month on Wed., Oct. 4, with two simultaneous events: the mural ribbon-cutting ceremony, and the annual Latinx Fiesta recognizing Latinx art, history, and culture.

Latinx Fiesta featured food, music, and craft representing HCC faculty, staff, and students from some South American, Latin American, and Caribbean countries.

The biggest mural, located on the wall of Marieb Building facing the Holyoke Community College courtyard, features a sepia-toned likeness of a Bomba dancer and drummer and stands three stories tall. The mural portrait is an actual representation of a classroom at the famous Tata Cepeda school in Puerto Rico. Tata Cepeda (born Margarita Sánchez Cepeda) is considered one of the most important and influential Afro-Puerto Rican folklorists of our time. She is the granddaughter of Rafael Cepeda Atilas, recognized as "The Patriarch" of the modern form of Bomba and Plena.

The second mural on the second floor of the Campus Center, spelling out "E-L C-E-N-T-R-O" in bold, blue letters from floor to ceiling behind silhouettes of icons of U.S Latinx, Caribbean and Latin American history. Among the 16 figures featured on the mural are Baseball Hall Famer of Roberto Clemente (Puerto Rico), and 1982 Literature Nobel Prize winning author Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia), Luisa Moreno, a Guatemalan-born labor activist, Víctor Jara, the Chilean folk singer who was tortured and murdered on by the Pinochet's dictatorship, and the Mirabal sisters, who were murdered by demonstrating their opposition against the regime of the dictator Rafael Trujillo (El Jefe) in the Dominican Republic.

A third mural presents a brightly colored image of a traditional Puerto Rican vejigante mask. It is located on the wall in the reception area of El Centro that can be seen through glass windows of the office. El CENTRO is a bilingual student-support program to meet the needs of HCC Latinx students.

Julissa Colón, director of El CENTRO, shared that, "Not only are the murals beautiful, but they show our students that their history has value, that they come from incredible stories of strength, success, bravery." She added, "I want to say that you showing up today matters, It shows the institution and our community that we have a voice and that we are unafraid to use it, and that the work that is being brought to our campus represents us and what we want to say about ourselves."



HCC President George Timmons, Muralist Betsy Casañas, Aaron Vega, Director of Planning & Economic Development of the city of Holyoke, Alan H. Bloomgarden, Director of Foundation and Government Grants HCC, and Julissa Colón, director of El CENTRO.



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