



Whittier Union

HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Oct. 16, 2023 **CONTACT:** Andrea Garcia **PHONE:** 909-447-2403

Whittier Union Maintenance Worker Celebrates Chicano Culture in Award-Winning Documentary

WHITTIER – History will be made when the California Museum screens “The Great American Lowrider Tradition,” an award-winning car culture documentary created and produced by Pioneer High School maintenance custodian Martin Torrez, as part of the museum’s Fall programming celebrating the rich history, artistry and impact of low rider culture.

The film will be screened on Saturday, Oct. 21, followed by a Q&A with Torrez and documentary subjects Oscar Ruelas, co-founder of Duke’s So. Cal, believed to be the world’s longest-running low rider club, and Little Willie G., lead singer for the legendary Chicano band, Thee Midnites.

The screening will be the first time a movie exploring American car culture will be presented at the museum and represents a major advancement in telling the first-hand stories of lowrider enthusiasts who endured decades-long racial discrimination for pursuing their passions and celebrating their Chicano heritage.

“Having this documentary screened at the state capital is a dream come true. For me, it’s like winning an Academy Award,” Torrez said. “Lowriders have an epic history and its culture is celebrated all over the world. But in California, we still have laws banning the cars and discrediting our traditions. We are working to repeal the laws, and screening at the California Museum is a huge step forward.”

The documentary has already created a substantial buzz, winning the Breaking Barriers Award at the Portland Film Festival in 2021, where it made its debut, and the Audience Favorite Award at the Downtown Los Angeles (DTLA) Film Festival in 2022, where it set a festival record by selling out its first screening at L.A. Live in 13 hours. Two subsequent screenings also sold out in record time.

Torrez came to Pioneer High School in July 2022, just prior to the screening at the DTLA Film Festival. No one in the District had any idea that Torrez was a self-taught filmmaker, let alone an award-winning documentary producer, until he appeared on an NBC4 morning news segment promoting the film wearing his Pioneer Titan sweatshirt.

“I appreciate the tremendous support from the Board of Trustees and District for the film. But I tell them, despite the film’s success, I’m not going anywhere,” Torrez said. “I love my job and I’m a proud member of the Whittier Union community. I want to be able to give back to our kids. Part of that is empowering them with their own history and the positive impact that it’s had on our culture.”

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“The Great American Lowrider Tradition” tells the story of lowriders as a uniquely American culture and art form, in the words and images of those who created and continue to maintain the lifestyle. Meticulously researched, the documentary works to restore credit to lowrider pioneers, push back on negative media connotations, and call for legislative action to repeal anti-cruising laws.

The documentary is a labor of love for Torrez, who researched, wrote, filmed, edited and narrated the film on his own, even composing some of the music on the soundtrack. Torrez is driven by the opportunity to tell the story of car culture aficionados, which include his 9-year-old son.

“We are so proud of Martin Torrez, who has turned his passion for Southern California car culture into a compelling historical document,” Superintendent Dr. Monica Oviedo said. “Martin’s determination to reclaim the narrative on behalf of the lowrider community has made him a role model and inspiration to the community and his colleagues.”

For more information about the film, visit lowriderdocumentary.org.

PHOTO CAPTION

WUHSD_TORREZ1: Pioneer High School maintenance custodian Martin Torrez has produced the award-winning “The Great American Lowrider Tradition” documentary, which will be shown at the California Museum as part of the museum’s Fall programming celebrating the impact of low rider culture.

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