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School of Arts and Culture at MHP Leader Tamara Alvarado Leaves to Head Shortino Foundation

Vanessa Shieh named interim executive director while board recruits for successor

San José, Calif. --- Tamara Alvarado announced today that she will be leaving the School of Arts and Culture at MHP this month to become executive director of the Leo M. Shortino Family Foundation in San José. She has served as the School's executive director since its founding in 2011.

The School's board of directors has appointed associate director Vanessa Shieh as interim executive director while the board conducts an extensive search for a successor. Shieh has been associate director for the past six years.

"It's a bittersweet moment for me as I leave a place and people I love for a new venture in the world of local philanthropy where I can continue to make a positive impact in the lives of children and their families," said Alvarado.

"Yet, I'm so proud of what we've accomplished together to make the School of Arts and Culture a strong and healthy organization, and I have full confidence that it will continue to serve as a valuable asset for the people of our community."

Guided by an extensive community planning process designed to re-imagine the future of the Mexican Heritage Plaza in East San José, the School of Arts and Culture at MHP was created in partnership with the East San Jose community and the City of San José in 2011.

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“We deeply thank and commend Tamara for her leadership and contributions as our executive director, and we look forward to a continuing relationship with her in her new role,” said Carmen Sigler, chair of the School’s board. “Under her steady guidance, the School has become a vibrant place of learning, culture, and community that enhances the lives of our children, families, and all who participate in our programs”

Sigler said the board’s executive committee has already started the process of transition and the recruitment for the next executive director who can build on the strong foundation created by Tamara and her team.

“Vanessa Shieh is thoroughly familiar with our programs and our vision, and her extensive experience and skills in non-profit administration and finance will keep us on a steady course,” she said. “We’ll continue to work in partnership with our community during this transition, and all our quality programs will continue to move forward as planned.”

During Alvarado’s leadership, the School and the Mexican Heritage Plaza have earned a positive reputation for their commitment to their East San José communities and the excellence of their programs.

The School has developed a strong financial position and enjoys the committed support of many multi-year funders. It recently completed a long-term strategic plan to carry out its vision for enriching the arts and culture of the people of San José.

In addition the School is a partner in the founding of the *Si Se Puede Collective*, along with SOMOS Mayfair, Grail Family Services, and Amigos de Guadalupe, that joins the four community agencies serving low-income Latino families in the Mayfair neighborhood of East San José. Through joint advocacy, coordinated service delivery and accessibility, and sharing of costs and business operations, the Collective is creating a model of organizational collaboration to promote greater community impact.

“I’m delighted that Tamara will join us at the Foundation to follow the great work done by Elaine Curran, our founding executive director who is retiring,” said David Heiman, chair of the Shortino Family Foundation board of trustees. “Tamara’s passion, commitment, and leadership so fully seen at the School of Arts and Culture make her an excellent fit for our mission.”

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About the School of Arts and Culture

Guided by an extensive community planning process designed to re-imagine the future of the Mexican Heritage Plaza in East San José, the School of Arts and Culture at MHP was created, embraced by the community, and adopted by the City of San José in 2011. The School has become a vibrant place of learning, culture, and community that nurtures the soul and brings joy, skill building, and a sense of belonging to children, families, and all who participate.

We believe that creativity and innovation are the lifeblood of our economy, and that the arts and creative experiences help our children develop skills for critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. In addition, we believe that these experiences enhance children's self esteem, cross-cultural understanding, empathy and connection to their community and to each other. Finally, we believe that our children need equitable access to the arts and creative experiences and that no child should be turned away for lack of resources.

The Mexican Heritage Plaza is a uniquely designed cultural facility located in the Mayfair neighborhood of East San Jose, a predominantly Mexican-American neighborhood since the mid-20th century. MHP was built by the City of San Jose in 1999 on the site of one of the first grocery store boycotts for farm workers' rights organized by César Chavez in the 1960s.

The School offers afterschool sessions and summer sessions in visual and performing arts, and it provides a multicultural and intercultural venue for community events and programs that embrace all cultures, while exploring the artistic traditions, cultural history, and contemporary creative expression of Mexican Arts. All school sessions culminate in a student performance/exhibition, coordinated by School faculty and staff and attended by family and community members. For more information go to <http://schoolofartsandculture.org>.

About the Leo M. Shortino Family Foundation

Established in 1990, the Foundation's mission is to act as a catalyst to enhance the quality of life in Santa Clara County through charitable giving to support at-risk kindergarten -12th grade youth and their families through education and the arts. The most vulnerable youth receive encouragement and opportunities resulting in healthy, well-educated citizens with high self-esteem and personal and professional goals, who successfully contribute to our local community and economy.

The Foundation addresses barriers to educational achievement for at-risk youth, such as limited English language skills and poverty, in order to close the persistent achievement gap and creating economic opportunity. It pursues innovative partnerships that address these barriers and enhance school curricula to meet the social and emotional needs of students and families so that they can achieve their educational goals. The Foundation also supports access to the arts that enhance a child's development, foster academic achievement, and help motivate them to learn, particularly among low-income and other at-risk students. For more information, go to www.shortino.org.