



City of Arts & Innovation

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Riverside City Manager John Russo Honored for Nurturing Cheech Marin Center

Inland Empire Economic Partnership Names Russo “Public Partner of the Year”

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – Riverside City Manager John Russo has been named “Public Partner of the Year” by the Inland Empire Economic Partnership for his leadership on the development of the Cheech Marin Center for Chicano Art, Culture and Industry in downtown Riverside

Russo received the award at the organization’s annual dinner Wednesday night that celebrated nine individuals and organizations demonstrating exemplary leadership in positively impacting the quality of life in the Inland Empire region, which is home to 4.4 million people.

“The people we are honoring contribute every day in making the Inland Empire a better place to live and a better place for businesses to thrive,” said IEEP’s CEO and President Paul Granillo. “This year’s winners really impressed the judges by going above and beyond their expectation, and all of our winners should be immensely proud of what they have achieved.”

The center, affectionately dubbed “The Cheech,” would house Marin’s renowned collection of Chicano art and serve as an international destination for art lovers all over the world. Russo proposed the idea to Marin and has nurtured it in cooperation with the Riverside Art Museum, or RAM, which is in the midst of a fundraising campaign. Information can be found at: <https://thecheechcenter.org/>

“The excitement and enthusiasm that has accompanied the development of The Cheech is a testament to the community spirit that exists in Riverside,” Russo said. “I’m grateful to our elected officials, our city staff and the incredible team at RAM for what we have accomplished thus far. I look forward to bringing The Cheech to fruition for all of the residents of California and the nation.”

Marin is seeking a permanent home for more than 700 works of Chicano art, including paintings, sculptures, and photography. The Cheech would be located immediately adjacent to the historic Mission Inn Hotel & Spa in a building that currently houses Riverside’s Main Library. The library is moving to a new location a few blocks away.

The Riverside City Council approved a Memorandum of Understanding in May that allows the City, Cheech Marin and RAM to negotiate details of the project. Since then, the State of California has allocated \$1 million of state funds to the effort because legislators believe it will help tell the story of Latinos in California and their contribution to the state's growth and prosperity.

"The Cheech is an incredible opportunity to create another remarkable cultural destination in downtown Riverside," Mayor Rusty Bailey said. "I applaud IEEP for recognizing the leadership that John Russo has displayed in capturing this opportunity for Riverside."

Russo has been City Manager of Riverside since May 2015, leading a municipal workforce of more than 2,400 employees. He previously spent nearly four years as City Manager of Alameda and before that served as the City Attorney of Oakland for 11 years.

Russo presented Marin with the idea for what is now known as The Cheech after the City Council decided to move the Main Library from its existing location, where it has been for more than 50 years, to a new, state-of-the-art library building closer to the Fox Performing Arts Center.

The existing location, which would be home to The Cheech, is in the heart of Riverside's downtown arts and culture district, about a block from RAM. Marin has pledged to travel the world to spread the word of The Cheech and the diverse range of educational programs that will be presented there.

"Riverside is the arts and culture capitol of Inland Southern California, so The Cheech is a great fit for our downtown," Mayor Pro Tem Chris MacArthur said. "John Russo has done an excellent job in taking an idea, and turning it into something the community can embrace."