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Unwrapping Tradition: 2020 Tamal Institute Shares History and Significance of Tamales through Free Virtual Series

SAN ANTONIO (October 13, 2020) – The City of San Antonio World Heritage Office presents the San Antonio UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy 2020 Tamal Institute: Los Tamales de Nuestros Antepasados on Friday, October 16, 2020 from noon-1 p.m. The community can watch the free event online by registering on www.tamal-institute-utsa.eventbrite.com, where they will receive the link to view.

This event – in collaboration with UTSA Libraries Special Collections, Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center and The Culinary Institute of America – is the first in a series of virtual events that focus on the history, tradition, and significance of tamales and tamaladas in San Antonio.

“San Antonio, as a confluence of cultures, is home to many wonderful culinary traditions that are enjoyed and practiced every day by people of all backgrounds,” said Colleen Swain, Director of the World Heritage Office. “That’s the beautiful thing about food – it brings people together. We hope that through the Tamal Institute people will learn about tamales being more than a favorite holiday food, but a tradition and practice that dates back thousands of years.”

Attendees will discover ancient tamal recipes from the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) Mexican Cookbook Collection and new ways of preparing traditional tamales with a cooking demonstration by Dr. Lilliana Saldaña, UTSA Associate Professor of Mexican American Studies. A panel discussion will include Saldaña as well as Cristina Ballí, Executive Director of the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center; Stephanie Noell, Special Collections Librarian with UTSA Libraries Special Collections; and moderated by Dean Hendrix, Dean of UTSA Libraries.

With more than 2,000 titles in both English and Spanish, the Mexican Cookbook collection at UTSA is the largest in the nation and includes recipes as far back as 1789.

“Some manuscripts in the collection include handwritten recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation,” Hendrix said. “A tamalada is a true definition of

how culture is expressed through food, and like a cookbook, provides great insight into the stories and treasures that have lived in our region for centuries.”

The virtual series will continue on Monday, November 2, 2020 when the discussion will focus on tamales as part of Dia de los Muertos, and in December when the Tamal Institute highlights tamales and the holidays.

Created by The Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, the Tamal Institute is a community effort to explore and provide information on the origins, history and cultural significance of tamales and tamaladas in San Antonio, and to deepen understanding of the collective elements of tamaladas.

"Tamal making is a special way to honor Mexico's culinary traditions and the Guadalupe is honored to see the Tamal Institute continue to teach our community the history and process of the tamal. It's a great way to tie us to our ancestors," Ballí said.

In 2017, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated San Antonio as a Creative City of Gastronomy for its culinary legacy as a confluence of cultures and rooted in native, European and African traditions. As a UNESCO Creative City, San Antonio is part of a very distinct group of international cities committed to sharing best practices, developing partnerships that promote creativity, strengthening participation in cultural life, and integrating culture in urban development plans. The City's World Heritage Office oversees this designation for San Antonio.

More information on the Tamal Institute is available on the newly-launched San Antonio UNESCO Creative City of Gastronomy website, www.sacityofgastronomy.org. The website provides information on the designation, a community calendar of gastronomy-related events, profiles of local chefs, and more. Information on the World Heritage Office is available at www.sanantonio.gov/worldheritage.

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