

## 2023 City Spirit Award Nominee Biographies

### **Sophia Mendoza & Tracy Barlogio**

*Nominated by Mayor Lock Dawson*

Sophia and Tracy, retired US Army veterans, arrived in Riverside in May 2021 with a shared purpose: to cultivate beauty and community spirit in their new home. As integral contributors to the Mayor's Beautify Riverside initiative from its inception, they have ceaselessly labored to elevate the city's aesthetic allure. Sophia's commitment to community service shines through her role serving as a judge at the state and national level for the Family Career and Community Leaders of America competition, which recognizes young students leadership abilities and development in Family and Consumer Sciences education. She also serves as the Recording Secretary on the Board of Directors of Soroptimist International of Riverside, while also chairing the Gold Key Award committee, which recognizes women that have excelled in providing 15 years or more of volunteer service. Additionally, she helped to organize the Live Your Dream conference, helping young girls to recognize their true potential. Tracy brings fresh insights into the city's recreational landscape through his recent appointment to the Park and Recreation Commission. Armed with decades of military expertise, their vision for Riverside is one of serenity and vibrancy, where innovation, arts, and a strong sense of community converge to create an unparalleled quality of life in the heart of Inland Southern California.

### **Juan Navarro**

*Nominated by Councilmember Cervantes*

Founder of the Eastside Arthouse, Juan Navarro is an artist working primarily in acrylics and spray paints to create large-scale murals and fine art paintings while balancing his entrepreneurial work and growing family. The Eastside neighborhood of Riverside holds over a dozen revitalizing art installations and murals led by Juan with input and guidance from the community. Through the Eastside Arthouse, Juan endeavors to create sustainable practices for full-time artists to thrive in Southern California. He has worked on projects funded by both non-profit and commercial businesses such as the National Endowment of the Arts, California Arts Council, Riverside Community Health Foundation, U.S. Bank, Verizon, Macy's, Altura, and the City of Riverside. Navarro is currently featured as Artist-in-Residence at the Riverside Art Museum and was a highlighted muralist. On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, Juan and the **Riverside Art Museum** received the 2023 National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the nation's highest honor given to museums and libraries that make significant and exceptional contributions to their communities.

Juan shares his inspiring tale of art, passion, and community engagement as he changes Riverside, California, one brush stroke at a time. A true visionary and artist who combines his talents with a deep-rooted desire to uplift his community, Juan discovered his love for art and its power to create change at an early age. Taking his first art class in high school, Juan then became president of the art club at his high school. His journey as a muralist began with a simple idea: to use his artistic skills to beautify his neighborhood and bring people together. Through his unwavering commitment to his craft, Juan has successfully partnered with local government and businesses to create remarkable beautification projects. These projects breathe new life into once-dull walls and tell stories of Riverside's rich history and diverse culture. Through his work, he aims to inspire, educate, and instill a sense of pride in his community. "It's not just about

painting pretty pictures; it's about creating a lasting legacy for future generations to see the values and history from their communities.”

### **Ruben Guitron**

*Nominated by Councilmember Cervantes*

Pastor Ruben Guitron has been the Director and Pastor of the nonprofit organization Riverside Peacemakers since its establishment in 1993 under the leadership of Apostle Joseph L. Sims and Apostle Beatrice Sims of Riverside Faith Temple Ministries. Pastor Ruben has also been employed by Riverside Unified School District for over 30 years where he has received Employee of the Year.

In the early 1990's, during a time when crime was on the rise, the city was looking for a way to suppress violence before it affected the lives of our youth today. Apostle Joseph L. Sims had a vision of working with officials in the City of Riverside including the Mayor, City Council, Riverside Police Department, Parole, Probation, Riverside City College, UC Riverside and Riverside Unified School District. After numerous attempts of collaborating with the community and not receiving the response he needed, Apostle Joseph turned to Pastor Ruben to create and establish a street ministry to make a genuine difference that continued for 14 years. The street ministry Pastor Ruben led changed the lives of thousands of youths in Riverside.

Under Pastor Ruben's leadership, Riverside Peacemakers has been recognized and received numerous awards for their work including proclamations from Mayor Ron Loveridge, Riverside City Council, NAACP, Senator Barbara Boxer, the California Senate, the California State Assembly alongside Assemblymember Jose Medina, the House of Representatives, and Congressman Rod Pacheco to name a few.

As the Pastor of Riverside Peacemakers Ministries, Ruben hopes to make a difference wherever he goes. He has a passion to inspire people and youth to positively impact their communities and the world around them. He has been married to his beautiful wife Diana for 45 years. They have 10 children, 45 grandchildren and 14 great grandchildren.

### **Duane and Kelly Roberts**

*Nominated by Councilmember Conder*

The Roberts have contributed significantly to the preservation, restoration, recognition, and celebration of The Mission Inn Hotel & Spa. Their dedication of time and resources continues to enhance this historic hotel which was previously designated a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior. The Roberts created and funded the acclaimed Festival of Lights annual holiday event where visitors can enjoy more than five million dazzling holiday lights and animated characters.

They are active leaders and role models in Southern California. Each year, they have generously donated money and their time to various charities and organizations. A partial list includes Loma Linda University Children's Hospital Foundation, Fox Riverside Theater Foundation, Fox Performing Arts Center, Mission Inn Foundation, and the Mary S. Roberts Foundation that supports many charitable causes ranging from helping children with special needs, the homeless and hungry, and animal assistance.

**Beth Schwandt**

*Nominated by Councilmember Perry and Councilmember Hemenway*

Beth Schwandt is a career teacher with over 30 years of experience who specializes in the education of music with the Alvord Unified School District. She has held multiple positions and is currently an instructional coach over their expanded learning program. In this capacity, she also works and serves as a board member for the Riverside Arts Academy.

She describes her music as “an all-encompassing curriculum that embraces literacy, multi-cultural diversity, ethnic studies, social justice, English language development, social/emotional therapy and behavioral intervention.”

She is respected by her students, peers and community. In 2023, she was recognized and named as 1 of 4 Riverside County of Education Teachers of the Year.

She has a proven history of providing her students with field trip opportunities to expand their knowledge and experience. Most recently, she worked with city staff to facilitate a program entitled "Make A Ripple." This program provided an opportunity for AUSD students to perform the arts (music and dance) at The Fox Performing Arts Center to a near capacity crowd.