



## CI's Bracero Exhibit Will Include the Story of Braceros in Ventura County

Camarillo, CA Aug. 31, 2010 - CSU Channel Islands (CI) will host, "Bittersweet Harvest: The Bracero Program 1942-1964", a bilingual exhibition organized by the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service and CI's local exhibit called "The Braceros of Ventura County". These exhibits will be on display at CI's John Spoor Broome Library September 9 through October 31, 2010.

For residents of Ventura County, the exhibit serves to illustrate the impact of the Bracero Program on the region. The program, begun in 1942 as a Mexican guest-worker program, brought Mexican men across the border to supplement the labor shortage created during World War II. The braceros signed work contracts that could range from three to six months and be renewed at the end of the term. Once in the United States they were housed in labor camps. The largest of these camps was located in the city of Oxnard, the Buena Vista Labor camp, which housed 5,000 men during the 1950's. Twenty percent of all braceros who came to Ventura County worked in the citrus, fruit, and vegetable fields.

As Jose Alamillo, Associate Professor of Chicana/o Studies, explained, "The Bracero Program has had a major impact on the county in economic, cultural and political terms".

When the program ended in 1964, many of these same braceros returned to Ventura County because they had established local roots and had made contact with potential employers. It was not uncommon for various agricultural enterprises to follow their workers back to Mexico requesting that they return to live in company housing and work under enhanced terms of employment.

In 2008, CI joined the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, along with other universities and museums, to document and preserve the bracero experience. The Bracero History Project has collected over 700 interviews. CI students have added to this effort by conducting and collecting 71 interviews. Dozens of photographs, documents and artifacts have been recovered to tell the story of the largest guest-worker program, involving between four and five million men, in U.S. History.

Alamillo noted that the Bracero History Project helped him to understand his family better.

"As a child growing up in rural Mexico, I lived without my father and grandfather for long periods of time. The program had a very significant impact on the families these men left behind so they could come to the States and work. Mothers had to be both mother and father to their children." He added, "I resented their absence and was never able to be very close to them, knowing they would soon be gone again. I am sure my dad felt guilty

about his absence and must have wondered what it would have been like if he had been able to remain in Mexico."

Alamillo said that the local part of the exhibit was designed and created entirely by CI Chicana/o Studies and Art students. However, many students from Spanish, Library, and History courses contributed by conducting interviews with former braceros and/or transcribing and translating the interviews. Some of these same students were amazed to find out that some of their relatives had been braceros.

Pilar Pacheco, Assistant Director for the Center for Community Engagement, said, "It is an honor for us to host this national exhibit and to showcase our own local bracero exhibit. In doing so, we are able to celebrate and preserve the legacy of these hardworking individuals who gave so much to help grow and shape the identity of United States and Ventura County."

For information about the many special events that will take place during the course of the exhibit, visit <http://www.csuci.edu/bracero-exhibit/events.htm> or contact Pilar Pacheco at 805-437-8851 or [pilar.pacheco@csuci.edu](mailto:pilar.pacheco@csuci.edu).

For media inquiries contact Joanna Murphy, Assistant Director of Communication & Marketing at [joanna.murphy@csuci.edu](mailto:joanna.murphy@csuci.edu) or call 805-437-8915.

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