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Smithsonian Latino Center Celebrates Day of the Dead in the Virtual World *Participants in Virtual World Can Honor the Dead*

The Smithsonian Latino Center announces its third annual Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, Festival in its Latino Virtual Museum in Second Life, Oct. 31 to Nov. 2. This three-day celebration includes several online activities to celebrate this popular Latin American holiday. Día de los Muertos is celebrated throughout Mexico, Central America and in many Latino communities in the U.S. to honor deceased family and friends. This is done by creating altars or *ofrendas*, which include traditional foods, sugar skulls, marigolds and material goods the deceased enjoyed while alive. The purpose of the *ofrendas* is to encourage the departed souls to visit with family and friends.

The Día de los Muertos Festival begins Oct. 31 with a cemetery procession and performance in LVM's Placita (town square) featuring Elena Díaz Björkquist as Teresita Urrea, a spiritual healer or *curandera* in the U.S. at the turn of the century. A live performance and interview with the musical group *Radio La Chusma* takes place Nov. 1 as well as art, music and performances from artists and writers across the country. A highlight of the festival is Nov. 2 with the University of Notre Dame's Institute of Latino Studies taking on the Smithsonian Latino Center in a Mesoamerican ballgame. This ancient game, played almost 3,500 years ago using a rubber ball, will take place in LVM's music island. Information about this game can be found at www.ballgame.org. Other activities include a community altar in LVM's Placita, a Fiesta de las Calaveras (skeletons) and costume contest, a literary series titled *Dead Poets Virtual Reading & Open Mic* featuring music by César Iván, and a tribute to late Chicano artist Gilbert "Magu" Lujan.

"This year's Día de los Muertos Festival allows visitors to create an online presence that embraces the spirit of this culturally significant celebration and shares it with a global audience," said Melissa Carrillo, Latino Center director of New Media and Technology. "This celebration continues to grow in popularity among U.S. Latinos, which is evidenced in over 8,000 people visiting our space in Second Life last year to celebrate the festival." In addition to the cultural activities educators will have

access to several online resources, including Smithsonian Latino collections, a Day of the Dead user's guide and glossary, lesson plans, resource links and a website featuring an altar-building interactive.

People can participate by visiting the Latino Center's LVM to register and create an avatar at <http://latino.si.edu/education/LVMDayoftheDeadFestival.htm>. More information is available on the LVM blog at <http://latinovirtual.blogspot.com/>.

The Smithsonian Latino Center ensures Latino contributions to arts, sciences and the humanities are highlighted, understood and advanced through the development and support of public programs, scholarly research, museum collections and educational opportunities at the Smithsonian Institution and its affiliated organizations across the United States. For more information, visit www.latino.si.edu.

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