Table of Dignity
Agricultural Workers Memorial

Public Unveiling Ceremony
Friday, August 25, 2017
10 a.m.

Table of Dignity Remarks
Ashleigh Aitken

Welcome to the OC Fair, and thank you for joining the Board of Directors, our executive team and our hardworking staff today.

Bienvenidos y gracias a todos
por estar aquí en un día tan especial.
Estamos felices de ver tantas caras familiares.

Today is one of the proudest moments of my five years as a Board of Director. I love opening day of the fair, and watching families make memories. I have enjoyed school trips with my kids to the farm, and watching them learn about our veterans inside Heroes Hall.

But today is personally special. I am in awe of what this Board was able to accomplish and honored for the privilege to present this tribute to the agricultural workers of Orange County, past and present.

We cannot undo the injustices agricultural workers suffered, but we can and must recognize their contributions, celebrate their lives, and honor their sacrifice.

Art is an emotional and powerful teacher.

Art can mystify our senses as well as our eyes. Art can evoke memories and feelings we forgot we had. It can challenge our beliefs and offend our morals. Art can make us long for those who fought for everything we hold dear. It can comfort the afflicted and at the same time afflict the most comfortable.

The same sculpture can represent something unique to each one of us – our reactions to the same painting can be as different as our DNA.

Given all the recent news that has centered around the role of public art in our parks and cities, this unveiling of the Agricultural Farmworkers Memorial could not come at a better time.
Frida Kahlo said,

Pinto flores para que así no mueran.

I paint flowers so they will not die.

Today we open the new Table of Dignity as a living memorial to our agricultural farmworkers, not just of the past but of today, so their dreams and sacrifices will not disappear like a bead of sweat quickly absorbed by the soil.

When 100,000 schoolchildren walk through these arches, they will learn about our past, flawed as it is, our present in its proper context, and the possibilities that lie ahead for all of us when we treat the hardest working laborer as equally important to the highest paid executive.

The sacrifices of the diverse workers in our community will not die, but live on as an example of what dignity in hard work, respect for all, and pride of community means.

Our memorial, titled Table of Dignity, is dedicated to the tens of thousands of agricultural workers who helped build Orange County from a vast land of citrus and bean farms to the metropolis it is today.

The design encompasses a central solid boulder, atop which sits a sculptural table made of 100-year old reclaimed redwood. A very old and solid foundation upon which a table rests, that when it was a young sapling, we would not have been legally allowed to break bread upon it together. Today, it represents a table that ALL in our community are welcome to gather around.

The arches we walk through were created by talented artists I would like to briefly highlight:

• The rammed earth portals by Rammed Earth Works, represented today by David Easton and his son Khyber. They celebrate art in geology by using natural soils to form resilient structures. David is the son of an orange grower in Anaheim and an Orange County native.

• The impressive paintings inside the arches are by Higgy Vasquez. He apprenticed with his father Emigdio Vasquez, and painted murals with his dad beginning in high school including “La Educacion y El Trabajo” for Irvine Valley College and the 60-foot mural at Cal State Fullerton, “Access, Education and Equity.”

Finalmente,
queiro que hablar
del trabajo de la familia de OC Fair.
• The surrounding area of decomposed granite, the flagstone entry and the grapevines and pergola were the labor and love of our own OC Fair staff and grounds crew. They keep this area beautiful for all to see and enjoy.

• The members of our Workers Memorial subcommittee, including my father and members of the OC Arts Council, led by Rick Stein. Your insights and suggestions were invaluable.

• Our board of directors, who without question supported this idea. Especially board chair Nick Berardino, who gave me a vision and let me run with it.

*Mucha gente ayudó a que este monumento sea hoy una realidad, pero es la labor de los trabajadores y trabajadoras agrícolas lo que hoy honoramos.*

*Es por el reconocimiento del sudor resultado del duro trabajo hecho para proveer para el sustento de sus familias por lo que estamos aquí hoy.*

*Los campesinos son las personas a quienes debemos ofrecer nuestro más sincero agradecimiento y aprecio.*

Many people helped bring this memorial to life, but it is the work of the farmworkers we honor.

Their sweat and hard work to provide for their families is why we are here today. The farmworkers are the people to whom we should all offer our sincerest thanks and appreciation.

*Muchas gracias por su asistencia y esperamos que disfruten de un muy buen día.*

Thank you for coming and enjoy.