



## The Oscar Salas Scholarship Fund

### Oscar Salas – Biography

For the last 40 years, Oscar made Plaza de la Raza his home away from home as an active member of our center and school. Oscar's affiliation with Plaza started as a dance student, a teacher and it culminated in his role as a dance choreographer with Plaza's resident company Folklor Pasión Mexicana.

Oscar Salas was born in Ramon Corona, Durango Mexico. He was 13 years old when he and his family immigrated to the United States. Upon settling in East Los Angeles, he attended Roosevelt High School where he was introduced to folklorico dance which would become his primary passion in life. In his formative years, he quickly learned he had a gift for dance and movement. Oscar's talent led him to become a member of the prestigious Danza Floricanto USA (a professional dance company in Los Angeles) eventually becoming one of its principal dancers. A lifelong student of the arts, Oscar trained extensively, attending and participating in numerous courses and workshops in Folklorico, Ballet, Modern and Jazz dance disciplines, always eager to learn and incorporate his artistic abilities to a plethora of artistic projects. The choreography and storytelling that Oscar integrated into his dance projects was a combination of training and an innate creative vision which allowed him to excel in different dance styles. In the 1990's, he transitioned to assist in the formation and creative development of AguaLuna Dance Company where he conceptualized repertoire and costuming alongside the company director. In 2011, Oscar was invited to be the Artistic Director of Folklor Pasion Mexicana elevating the company's profile and artistic merit. In his role as Pasion's Artistic Director, Oscar conveyed inspirational stories, through dance and visual representations to project and honor Mexican culture.

Oscar was able to share his passion for culture and folklorico throughout his career at LAUSD where he worked at various schools creating and inspiring students, teachers & parents with his love for the arts. At LAUSD, he began his career in the public sector as a teacher's assistant and moved up to

become an integral team member of the school's office administrative staff, assisting in the management and operations of each respective school he was assigned to. As part of the administrative staff, he worked closely with school principals and administrators in all operational aspects including the development and management of staff. Later, given his merit and high proficiency in school operations, strategy, and development he was promoted to work as a Chief Clerk within the Induction and Credentialing Programs at LAUSD headquarters where he was able to successfully provide support and expertise within assigned district program initiatives.

Oscar was a gifted artist and over the years at LAUSD he developed numerous public school art installations, murals, events, and projections that inspired and built community. As a multi-faceted artist, Oscar also created and displayed Día de los Muertos installations throughout Los Angeles County. He spent over 15 years as a creator of altars and became an award-winning Día de Los Muertos Altar Artist at Hollywood Forever Cemetery. His creativity and inspiration had many sources and a strong foundation. Oscar's great-grandmother and grandmother were his foundation and a constant inspiration for the Día de los Muertos installations. Oscar used industrial materials in his creations in a juxtaposition to display the coldness of death against the beauty and the festive celebration of Día de los Muertos. The use of the art form was recognized and awarded 2nd place in 2014 and 1st place in 2018 from the well-known and recognized Hollywood Forever Cemetery, Day of the Dead annual celebration. He also designed and supervised Plaza's fountain installation and public ofrenda for the annual Día de los Muertos festivities and Antonio Pelayo's El Velorio (multicultural day of the dead event) for the past seven years. Every year, he created a scene more spectacular than the year before, a centerpiece greeting for all as they came through the gates of Plaza to enjoy our annual festivities. Through his art, Oscar created an opportunity for visitors to develop a greater understanding and awareness of Mexican and Mexican American culture and we are forever grateful.

Oscar touched the lives of so many dancers, students, families and co-workers, his Plaza family, with joy, grace, creativity, and charm, and always so available to contribute to our Mexican culture. His loss cuts deep into our hearts, but he is loved and forever remembered. Oscar Salas, PRESENTE!

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