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**Celebrated Poet Alberto Álvaro Ríos Named as Arizona's Inaugural Poet Laureate**

**PHOENIX (August 19, 2013).** In partnership with the Office of the Governor, the Arizona Commission on the Arts is pleased to announce that celebrated poet and Arizona State University Regents' Professor **Alberto Ríos** has been named the inaugural Poet Laureate for the State of Arizona.

Arizona's Poet Laureate post commemorates and honors the wealth of Arizona literary artists who through their work and service, represent Arizona's values, independence, storied history and boundless potential. With this appointment, Arizona becomes the 43<sup>rd</sup> state in the nation to establish a Poet or Writer Laureate position.

**Governor Jan Brewer** said of the appointment, "I am proud to announce the appointment of Arizona's first Poet Laureate, in celebration of our state's remarkable literary history and future. Alberto Ríos demonstrates an unmatched dedication and love for the art of poetry. For more than four decades, his poetry and literary works have touched our communities and kept Arizona's culture and heritage alive. As Poet Laureate for the State of Arizona, Alberto will champion the art of American poetry, inspire an emerging generation of literary artists and educate Arizonans of all ages about the countless writers who have positively influenced our beautiful state."

Professor Ríos' work has been extensively published for nearly 4 decades, including 10 books of poetry, 3 books of stories, and a memoir – *Capirotada* – about growing up in his hometown of Nogales, Arizona.

Ríos has individual works in 300+ journals and 250+ anthologies, and has been honored with numerous awards, including the Walt Whitman Award in Poetry bestowed by The Academy of American Poets, the Western Literature Association Distinguished Achievement Award, the Arizona Literary Treasure Award and a Governor's Arts Award. Ríos has also led countless community projects in cities and towns across Arizona.

Ríos received both his BA and MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Arizona. As a full tenured professor in the English department at Arizona State University since 1989, Ríos was subsequently awarded the highest rank distinction the university system in Arizona can bestow, Regents' Professor.

Ríos said of his appointment as Arizona’s inaugural Poet Laureate, “This is a profound honor. A small-town border kid from Nogales to Poet Laureate—this is a good story, an Arizona story. As the state’s first Poet Laureate, the work of inventing this job is now at hand, and I’m very much looking forward to the adventure. The Poet Laureate designation is an important way for Arizona and its people to express a public regard for the well-written word. I would like to be part of that statement, a line in that poem.”

The purpose of the Poet Laureate post is to champion the art of American poetry, inspire an emerging generation of literary artists and educate Arizonans of all ages about the countless writers who have positively influenced our state.

During Arizona’s Centennial Year, **Senator Al Melvin** of Tucson sponsored Senate Bill 1348 to establish a state Poet Laureate. Executive Director of the Arizona Commission on the Arts, Robert Booker, said of Senator Melvin’s role, “Senator Melvin’s determination and responsiveness made all the difference in the establishment of this position. The Senator heard from one of his constituents, a poet and literary enthusiast, that Arizona was one of only 8 states without a Poet Laureate position, and sprang into action. He sponsored a bill, connected with the Arts Commission to workshop his proposal with representatives from Arizona’s education and literary communities, and served as a true champion for the bill as it made its way through the legislature.” SB1348 received broad bipartisan support in both State legislative chambers and was signed into law by Arizona Governor Jan Brewer in May 2012.

The Arizona Commission on the Arts, an agency of the State of Arizona, facilitated the nomination and selection process in Fall 2012. Nominations were open to the public and self-nominations were accepted. In total, eight nominations were received. All nominees were reviewed by a committee chaired by three Governor-appointed commissioners from the Arizona Commission on the Arts. As specified in SB1348, the review committee included representatives from literary publishing organizations, educational institutions, arts and culture organizations, businesses that present or support the literary arts, and poets not wishing to be considered for the position, from Northern, Central and Southern Arizona.

The nomination review committee was made up of the following individuals:

- **Gail Browne**, Former Executive Director of the University of Arizona Poetry Center; Tucson.
- **Harold Dorenbecher**, Senior Vice President and Managing Executive of The Northern Trust Bank, and Advisory Board Member for the Literary and Prologue Society of the Southwest; Phoenix.
- **Karyl Goldsmith**, Senior Literature and AP English Literature teacher at Sedona Oak Creek Unified School District; Sedona.
- **Kevin Vaughan-Brubaker**, Poet and Project Manager at Scottsdale Public Art; Phoenix.
- **Christy White**, President of the Arizona State Poetry Society; Cave Creek.
- **Ofelia Zepeda**, Regents’ Professor in the Departments of Linguistics and American Indian Studies at University of Arizona; Tucson.

The committee was chaired by three Governor-appointed commissioners from the Arizona Commission on the Arts:

- **Committee Review Chair: Lisa Barnes;** Mesa.
- **Committee Vice-Chair: Carol Crockett;** Phoenix.
- **Committee Vice-Chair: Patricia Kaufman;** Scottsdale.

The review committee said of Ríos, “This candidate has impressive experience with community outreach, is a fantastic performer and speaker who is able to get people to think about poetry in a whole new way. Alberto is thoughtful in his community work and has proven himself to be a strong public figure and advocate for poetry in Arizona.” They also offered, “Ríos was born and educated here in Arizona, and has contributed to Arizona communities for decades. If ever there was a poet who personified Arizona’s values, it is Alberto Ríos.”

As per SB1348, Ríos will serve a term of two years; will offer public readings throughout the year, in urban and rural communities in various regions of the state; and will pursue a major literary project over the course of the appointment term. Public events to celebrate the appointment of Arizona’s inaugural Poet Laureate will be announced in Fall 2013.

The Arizona Poet Laureate will be provided with an annual honorarium of \$2,500 to offset travel and so that he/she is able to actively serve the broadest constituency of Arizonans, who live, learn and work in urban, rural and suburban areas of the state. The honorarium will be disbursed from the Arizona Poet Laureate Fund, which consists of private monies donated by individuals, organizations or businesses – raised by the Arts Commission and its statewide literary partners.

### **About Alberto Ríos**

Alberto Álvaro Ríos, born in 1952 in Nogales, Arizona, is the author of ten books and chapbooks of poetry, three collections of short stories, and a memoir.

His books of poems include, most recently, *The Dangerous Shirt*, preceded by *The Theater of Night*, winner of the 2007 PEN/Beyond Margins Award, along with *The Smallest Muscle in the Human Body*, a finalist for the National Book Award, *Teodoro Luna’s Two Kisses*, *The Lime Orchard Woman*, *The Warrington Poems*, *Five Indiscretions*, and *Whispering to Fool the Wind*. His three collections of short stories are, most recently, *The Curtain of Trees*, along with *Pig Cookies*, and *The Iguana Killer*.

His memoir about growing up on the Mexico-Arizona border—called *Capirotada*—won the Latino Literary Hall of Fame Award and, most recently, was designated as the One Book Arizona choice for 2009.

Ríos is the recipient of the Western Literature Association Distinguished Achievement Award, the Arizona Governor’s Arts Award, fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, the Walt Whitman Award, the Western States Book Award for Fiction, six Pushcart Prizes in both poetry and fiction, and inclusion in *The Norton Anthology of Modern*

*Poetry*, as well as over 250 other national and international literary anthologies. His work is regularly taught and translated, and has been adapted to dance and both classical and popular music.

Ríos is a Regents' Professor at Arizona State University, where he has taught for over 30 years and where he holds the further distinction of the Katharine C. Turner Endowed Chair in English.

**For more information about Alberto Álvaro Ríos, including downloadable high-resolution photos,** visit [www.public.asu.edu/~aarios/](http://www.public.asu.edu/~aarios/).

**About the Arizona Commission on the Arts**

One of 56 state and jurisdictional arts agencies, the Arizona Commission on the Arts is a 47-year-old agency of the State of Arizona charged with supporting a statewide arts and culture sector. The agency is governed by a 15-member Governor-appointed Commission and a professional staff grounded in the arts. The Arts Commission receives and administers funds from the State of Arizona and the National Endowment for the Arts and directs this funding to programs which contribute to the growth and stabilization of the arts, impact student learning, nurture and develop artists' craft and skills, preserve the rich traditions of Arizona communities, and encourage participation by citizens of all ages and abilities.

For more information about the grants, services and programs of the Arizona Commission on the Arts, visit [www.azarts.gov](http://www.azarts.gov).

*We imagine an Arizona where everyone can participate in and experience the arts.*

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