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Por Siempre María: Commemorating the Puerto Rican Spirit in the Aftermath of Hurricane María with Orange County Library System and Latino Leadership

ORLANDO, FL – On Saturday, September 17, 2022, from 3-5 p.m., Orlando Public Library will host a free public reception for the photo exhibition *Por Siempre María*. This show features the photography of Janel Norton, former United States Air Force combat photographer and United Nations photojournalist. This exhibition will be on view September 12, 2022, through January 8, 2023.

After many years of working as a photojournalist, Norton started a non-profit called [Veterans Alternative](#), where she later met a fellow Air Force veteran who owned an aeronautical company with airlift operations capabilities. When Hurricane María passed over Puerto Rico in 2017, leaving the island in a desperate state, they joined forces to help in the best way they could. They gathered their shared resources, collected relief supplies and organized countless volunteers to bring humanitarian aid to Puerto Ricans on the island in need. With a background in documenting community hardships around the world, Norton made her way to the island, camera in hand.

“For me, documenting the struggle was obvious, but I wanted to also show the connection between the island and the U.S. and how that bridge came together,” said Norton. “We are all in this together, our struggles are the same. I hope that my images will convey this to those who view them.”

The exhibition is part of a joint effort by Orange County Library System and local nonprofit [Latino Leadership](#), with sponsorship from Valencia College, Heart of Florida United Way, the Florida State Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and Pereira Reyes Consulting. “Hurricane Maria and its aftermath will forever be ingrained in our hearts. From the immediate aftermath to the response work done in Central Florida, Hurricane Maria's legacy and impact are still evident five years later. Through the Por Siempre Maria photography exhibit, we hope to commemorate lives lost, while highlighting the beauty and joy in chaos,” said Marucci Guzmán, Latino Leadership’s Executive Director.

"Even in the aftermath of a natural disaster like Hurricane María, Janel's photography shows the strength, resilience and impact that can be had when communities show up for each other," said Steve Powell, Orange County Library System's Director/CEO. "We are proud to host this moving exhibit at Orlando Public Library."

Taken in the immediate aftermath of Hurricane María, Janel Norton's photographs capture the essence of the Puerto Rican spirit even in time of turmoil and despair. The public is invited to view this exhibition during normal library operating hours.

About Latino Leadership

Incorporated as a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization in 2001, Latino Leadership's mission is to guarantee the welfare of our children by helping to create a model, strong and vibrant Hispanic community through leadership development and empowerment, education advancement and economic community development.

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