

# El Paso author wins Texas' writers lifetime award

Ramón Rentería, El Paso Times 3:25 p.m. MDT September 24, 2016



Pat Mora, an El Paso native and a widely respected award-winning author, has won the Texas Institute of Letters' prestigious Lon Tinkle Award for Lifetime Achievement.

"I take pride in being a Latina writer," Mora said in a press release announcing the award. "I continue to write and work to deepen and be more inventive."

The Lon Tinkle Award is the highest honor given by the Texas Institute of Letters, which was established in 1936 to recognize distinctive literary achievement.

"Pat Mora is one of the most beloved and acclaimed writers from Texas," Texas Institute of Letters president Steve Davis said in a press release. "It was a joyful occasion when the TIL council voted unanimously to honor Pat with this award."

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The award will be presented at the organization's annual banquet, scheduled for April 8, 2017, in El Paso.

"Pat Mora represents the highest principles of writing, both in her work and in her life," Davis said. "She was a groundbreaking literary voice early in her career as a poet and essayist, and her subsequent efforts to spread joy through books and reading has benefited so many children and families around the country. She is an inspiration to so many of us."

Davis pointed out that it's especially appropriate that the Texas Institute of Letters will recognize Mora when the Institute gathers for its annual meeting in her hometown.

"El Paso has arguably the richest literary heritage of any city in Texas, and Pat Mora is one of the great writers from El Paso. Honoring her at our banquet in El Paso will put a big exclamation point on the meeting," Davis said.

Mora grew up in a bilingual home in El Paso where books were cherished. She is the author of nearly 50 books, including 36 for children. Her books of poetry and nonfiction

for adults include "Agua Santa/Holy Water," "Aunt Carmen's Book of Practical Saints," "Borders," "Chants," "House of Houses," and "Neplanta: Essays from the Land in the Middle."

Mora's writing is often shaped by her life growing up on the U.S.-Mexico border.

"Family, Mexican American culture, and the desert are all important themes," she once said. "The desert, mi madre, is my stern teacher ... the Southwestern landscape has been my point of reference."

"Ms. Mora's poems are proudly bilingual, an eloquent answer to purists who refuse to see language as something that lives and changes," The New York Times said of Mora's poetry collection, "Agua Santa/Holy Water."

"I write, in part, because Latina perspectives need to be part of our literary heritage including literature for children and young adults," Mora said. "From large and small publishing houses, all of our diverse children, need good, well-illustrated books that reflect their lives. Our young need and deserve to feel pride in home languages and cultures."

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In 1996, Mora founded the community-based, family literacy initiative, El día de los niños, El día de los libros/ Children's Day, Book Day, now commonly known as Día. In the years since, Día has grown in the United States to include all children, languages and cultures.

Mora has won more than a dozen national literary awards during her career and received the "Texas Writer" Award from the Texas Book Festival in 2015. The American Library Association has named her an Honorary Member. Both North Carolina State University and SUNY-Buffalo have awarded her honorary doctorates and her alma mater, the University of Texas at El Paso, has named her a distinguished alumnus.

Mora, the mother of three children, and grandmother of a granddaughter who lives in Austin, is married to Vern Scarborough. She has been a teacher, university administrator and consultant. She has received a National Endowment of the Arts Poetry Fellowship, a Kellogg National Leadership Fellowship, and three Southwest Book Awards.

She often speaks about creativity, creative writing, leadership and advocacy at conferences, schools, and universities. She said she enjoys encouraging audiences to view their cultures, homes, and landscapes as catalysts for writing and for creativity.

The Texas Institute of Letters is a non-profit organization that promotes interest in Texas literature and recognizes literary achievement.

The group's elected membership consists of the state's most recognized and serious writers of fiction, poetry, journalism, and scholarship, including winners of the Pulitzer Prizes in drama, fiction, and nonfiction, as well as prizes awarded by PEN and dozens of other regional and national award and grant-giving institutions.

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