

Vallejo is grateful for...

## Mario Saucedo



Mario wears a festive hat that he made from a lampshade for Dia de los Muertos.

**Place of birth:** Morelia, Michoacan, Mexico

**Year arrived in Vallejo:** 2004

**Languages:** Spanish and English

**Occupation:** Designer and co-founder / president of Solano AIDS Coalition

**What is your most important contribution to Vallejo?**

All the awareness, education and prevention I bring through the Solano AIDS Coalition. I've also brought a lot of culture to Vallejo. I started Vallejo's Dia de los Muertos celebration, the traditional Mexican Day of the Dead festival that happens every November. It's a fun and colorful cultural event where I can also educate people about health issues in a more informal setting.

**What have you done during the pandemic to help others?**

SAC has delivered food and clothing to households of those who were unable to shop due to COVID-19 infections. We've also provided information

about COVID-19 to people, especially about the need for vaccination. And we've created a COVID-19 awareness quilt to educate people and honor all the lives lost in Solano.

**What is one pandemic silver lining?** Our common helplessness in the face of this virus has united many people. You never know who could be next, so you have to tell people you love them. Sadly, I lost one of my brothers to COVID-19. I hope we'll keep this spirit of caring for each other.

**What is your special talent?** I love people and like to see them happy. I'm also very artistic and love art. I make many special items for Dia de los Muertos, such as beautiful gowns and other clothing.

**What is a special memory of Vallejo?** In 2006 or so, there was a little boy with cancer who was so crazy about Santa Claus. He gave me such a big hug after getting his toys at our toy drive. I'll never forget that. I've been doing the toy drive in Vallejo for 19 years. The pleasure of seeing kids picking up toys is better than any money you could give me. Every time I turn around some young woman or man says, "Hello Mr. Saucedo, do you remember me? Thank you for helping me when I was a kid!" People remember and give back as adults when they can.

**What is your favorite Vallejo community event?** Dia de los Muertos, with all of the history and culture it represents. It's one day every year that our ancestors join us with food, flowers and more. One year, I started calling out the names of all my loved ones, such as my mother and grandmother. Even people in the audience who weren't familiar with the tradition started calling out. People came up afterwards in tears, thanking me. Dia de los Muertos is not about fear of death, it's about celebrating life.

**What do you hope for Vallejo in the next 10 years?** We need the police department and government to do their jobs. We need more job opportunities and business, more affordable housing, and improved trash collection. I could go on!

**What organization in Vallejo do you really appreciate?** There are so many, but especially Solano Serenity Center, 7 Generations Intertribal Council, Vallejo Peace Project, Askari Sowonde Productions, and the Immersive Learning Center.