



## 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Cottonwood Awards Luncheon

Thursday, May 25, 2023 | 11 am - 1 pm

Rancho Los Alamitos Historic Ranch and Gardens  
6400 East Bixby Hill Road, Long Beach, CA 90815

### ***Craig Torres***

#### **2023 Cottonwood Special Recognition Award Honoree**



While many brag about being 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Californians, Tongva Elder Craig Torres is descended from the Indigenous communities of the Yaavetam (Los Angeles) and Komiikravetam (Santa Monica Canyon), who have called the Los Angeles Basin home for thousands of years.

A respected cultural educator and artist working in digital and mixed media, Craig has been active all his adult life ensuring Tongva stories, language, and values are passed to future generations and shared with the broader community. He has consulted for numerous schools, museums, and nature centers on Tongva history, culture, and contemporary issues. He's done the same for city, state, and government agencies. He has furthered his mission with interviews on NPR and KCRW and with cooking demonstrations on PBS. In 2021, when UCLA expanded its "Archive of Healing," Craig helped create programs for Tongva and other Indigenous communities, including "Kitchen Medicinals," for people not likely to benefit from federal Covid-19 relief programs.

Craig is a member of the Traditional Council of Pimu (one of several Tongva communities in the area) and is involved with Ti'at Society, an organization focused on reviving the Indigenous maritime culture of the Southern California coastal region. (A ti'at is a plank canoe used for fishing and travel.) As part of the Chia Café Collective, Craig encourages people to reconnect with the land through gathering, gardening, and preparing traditional foods. He advocates for "indigenizing" public and residential landscapes, including his own garden, restoring relationships with the native plants of each place.

In the 1990s, Craig partnered with the Rancho Los Alamitos Foundation to develop a grade-school curriculum about Indigenous culture. From that time to the present, Craig has shared the program weekly with Southern California third-graders. Titled *Tovaave: A Tongva Cultural Program*, learners engage in storytelling, song, games, and hands-on activities as a way of absorbing Tongva culture and ideas. During the pandemic, when schools weren't coming to the Rancho, Craig and the *Tovaave* team worked tirelessly and creatively to translate the program to a format that teachers and students could access remotely. *Virtual Tovaave* includes materials for teachers, videos, and interactive exercises that encourage students to think about the lessons and what they mean to them. These videos not only contribute to the mission of Rancho Los Alamitos, but they also preserve the voices, music, and stories of the Tongva people for future generations.

Craig's work has significantly impacted the cultural development of Rancho Los Alamitos. He patiently and generously teaches staff, volunteers, students, and their teachers about Tovaangar, Povuun'nga, the ancestors, and mother earth. He shares Tongva values, culture, and stories with youth, who, in turn, share what they learn with their friends and families. Craig's lessons teach us never to take more than we need and always to give back. He helps us all to understand the world that came before, the world we live in today, and to think about the world we will leave to future generations.