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City Council Document Tracking Sheet

Meeting Date:	5/9/2012
Sponsor(s):	Maldonado, Roberto (26)
Type:	Resolution
Title:	Commemoration of 90th birthday of Marquita Rivera
Committee(s) Assignment:	

MEMORIALIZING THE 90th ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF MARQUITA RIVERA

WHEREAS, On May 18, 2012, the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture will posthumously honor the legendary dancer and actress Marquita Rivera on the anniversary of her 90th birthday with the Antonio Martorell Award for Artistic Excellence; and

WHEREAS, Founded in 2001 by members of Chicago's Puerto Rican community and local supporters of arts and culture, the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture preserves and nurtures Puerto Rico's identity and heritage. Since its inception, the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture has offered a variety of community arts and cultural programming, including visual art exhibitions, hands-on community arts workshops, films in the park and an annual outdoor fine arts and crafts festival; and

WHEREAS, Marquita Rivera started life as Maria Heronina Rivera de Santiago, the youngest child of seven brothers and five sisters born to Don Jesus Manuel Rivera de Perez and Dona Clara Asuncion Castro de Santiago in Fajardo, Puerto Rico on May 18, 1922. Her family moved to New York City when she was three months old and her artistic talents soon became apparent; and

WHEREAS, At age six, Marquita started studying dance and flamenco with the father of the famed actress Rita Hayworth, the famous dance master Eduardo Cansino. When she was thirteen years old, the lead dancer at a well-known nightclub was in an accident and was physically unable to perform. Her costume designer mother saw this as a chance to showcase her daughter's talent as a dancer. She so delighted the audience with her talents as a flamenco dancer and as a young rumbera she soon was headlining at the club. It was then her name was changed from Maria to Marquita; and

WHEREAS, Shortly thereafter, Marquita Rivera drew the attention of Broadway producer George Abbott, who gave her a spot as an exotic dancer in his production "Scandals of 1936" on Broadway. It was he who introduced her to the "King of Jazz", renowned bandleader Paul Whiteman, who offered her a two-year contract to tour with his band as the "Queen of the Conga"; and

WHEREAS, At the age of sixteen, Marquita Rivera was chosen to dance before Britain's King George VI and his wife, Queen Elizabeth, during their visit to the 1939 New York World's Fair. This was an honor that she would remember for the remainder of her life; and

WHEREAS, Marquita became the featured dancer in the original talking movie "Cuban Pete" alongside her childhood friend, iconic bandleader Tito Puente, who played drums with famed Puerto Rican bandleader Noro Morales playing the piano. She was now appearing in many New York venues, including The Roxy, Paramount, Loews State, Strand and Radio City Musical Hall. Marquita shared their stages with such illustrious stars as Frank Sinatra, Mickey Rooney, Ann Miller, Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis, Merv Griffin and Betty Hutton; and

WHEREAS, Marquita Rivera was also a marquee name in her homeland of Puerto Rico at such popular venues as Zero's Nightclub with orchestra leader Miguelito Miranda and the El San Juan Theatre. She was dubbed "The Latin Hurricane" for her rapid and fiery Afro-Cuban dance routines; and

WHEREAS, By the 1940's, Marquita Rivera was headlining at the infamous Lirico Theatre in Mexico City where she was noticed by legendary film director Fernando Soler who offered her a movie contract with Azteca Studios. She acted for him in two 1947 films, a drama "Me Persigue Una Mujer" with Jose Torvay and David Silva, and a comedy, "El Conquistador", also starring Torvay and Enrique Herrera. In 1948, she was awarded

the key to the city of San Juan by Mayoress Felisa de Rincon in recognition for her achievements on Broadway, Mexico, and in Hollywood.

WHEREAS, Marquita Rivera was married to business tycoon Albert Vernon Ashbrook from 1946 to 1949 and had one child, Marquita, her namesake. In 1951, she married physician Eugene Biscardi II, in New York City and their union was blessed with six children: Eugene III, Jessica, Louis, Robert, Joseph and Lucrezia. Shortly thereafter, she phased out her public life to concentrate on raising her large family; and

WHEREAS, Marquita Rivera made a special appearance at Carnegie Hall representing her beloved island of Puerto Rico, at a 1963 International Mother's Day Gala Concert that featured an all-star lineup, including opera performers Thomas Hayward, Rina Telli, Dino Formichini and James Boxwill, led by Philharmonic conductor Warner S. Bass. She did not appear again publicly until 1977 when she returned to the stage in a limited engagement of her own Off-Broadway revue, "The Marquita Rivera Show"; and

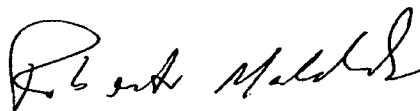
WHEREAS, After Marquita Rivera's husband retired in the 1980s, the couple relocated to Los Angeles where she would occasionally make episodic TV appearances, including "Sanford & Son" with Redd Foxx. However, after her husband's passing in 1988, she chose to retire completely from the limelight; and

WHEREAS, Marquita Rivera, an historic Puerto Rican actress and dancer on Broadway, an actress in Mexico, and the first actress from Puerto Rico to appear in a major Hollywood motion picture, passed away at the age of 80, at Cedars-Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles, California; and

WHEREAS, The Honorable Roberto Maldonado, Alderman of the 26th Ward, has apprised this august body of the high honor being bestowed on the late and legendary pioneering musical performer Marquita Rivera; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED That we, the Mayor and members of the City Council gathered together this 9th Day of May, 2012 AD, do hereby commemorate the late Marquita Rivera for her remarkable talent and trailblazing career as well as commend the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture for bestowing the Antonio Martorell Award for Artistic Excellence on such a deserving and noble spirit.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED That a suitable copy of this resolution be prepared and presented to the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture.



ROBERTO MALDONADO
Alderman – 26th Ward