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Governor Crist Unveils Xavier Cortada Murals at the Governor's Mansion ~ *Paintings Honor Hispanic Heritage Month* ~

TALLAHASSEE – Governor Charlie Crist today unveiled two murals by world-renowned artist Xavier Cortada at the Governor's Mansion in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month. The paintings, *Conquistadores* and *Raíces*, use mangroves as a metaphor to depict the history behind Florida's rich and diverse Hispanic cultures. Governor Crist and Cortada were joined at the event by Secretary of State Kurt Browning.

"Through his artwork, Cortada vividly captures the strength and confidence that have contributed to the success of our country's Hispanic American population," said Governor Crist. "Their hard work, sound leadership and unique cultures have contributed greatly to the vitality and triumphs of our state and our nation, and I am honored to recognize their achievements."

One of the acrylic-on-canvas paintings, *Conquistadores*, will be used in Florida's Hispanic Heritage Month poster and is being donated to the state's permanent art collection by sponsor Washington Mutual.

In *Conquistadores*, heavily armored Spanish conquistadors land amid mangroves on a Florida shoreline. The difficulty of their journey is depicted by the stormy skies and the whitecaps of uncharted waters. The crocodile in the foreground represents the hardships the first explorers suffered after they made land fall, including ambush and fights with Florida's indigenous peoples. During the early 16th century, no Spanish explorers were successful in establishing a settlement. Nonetheless, they planted their country's flag and claimed the land for Spain and, in so doing, began to set their roots in Florida. They were the first of many Hispanics who have contributed to the state's tapestry of cultures.

Raíces features a different picture of 16th century Florida. Half a century after Ponce de Leon first landed on its shores, Spanish families began to settle in Florida. Although hardship was widespread, the outlook for settlement was hopeful. Catholic missions (represented by the pelican at the bottom right of the painting) were established in Florida, creating a nexus between Spaniards and indigenous people. At the center of the painting, a family gazes at their newborn child. The family is integrated into a mangrove forest, its roots embracing and protecting them, much like community

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members do for one another in their new settlement. In the foreground, new mangrove seedlings sprout. Like the seedlings, Floridians of Hispanic and Latin American origin have begun to set their roots in Florida as they will for centuries to come.

Cortada's artwork has been featured in museums, galleries, and other cultural venues throughout the nation and across Europe, Africa and Antarctica. Most recently, Cortada's work was exhibited during the Governor's Summit on Global Climate Change held in Miami, Florida, on July 12-13, 2007. During the Summit, Cortada presented Governor Crist and California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger with "ice paintings" that were created using sea ice, glacier and sediment samples provided to him by scientists working in Antarctica. The full exhibit is currently on display in the Governor's Office.

In another exhibit, *Endangered World*, Cortada used acrylic paint diluted with Antarctic sea water to paint 24 flags with the scientific name and longitudinal coordinates of endangered animal species whose habitats are being destroyed by man. The flags are currently on display in the in the Capitol Rotunda in commemoration of Hispanic Heritage Month.

In further celebration of Florida's Hispanic Heritage, Governor Crist invited Florida students in kindergarten through 12th grades to participate in the fifth annual Florida Hispanic Heritage Month essay contest. The Governor also encouraged students, parents, teachers and principals to nominate full-time educators in elementary, middle or high schools for the inaugural Hispanic Heritage Month Excellence in Education Award. All submissions to both contests must be received by 5:00 p.m. on Friday, September 28, 2007.

Additional information about Florida's Hispanic heritage, contests and other related events are available on the Web site www.floridahispanicheritage.com.

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