A group of community leaders with ties to East Harlem has come together to kick off a project to create a mosaic mural to honor the legacy of Puerto Rican educational activist and founder of ASPIRA, Dr. Antonia Pantoja. The mural, to be placed in a public place in El Barrio, will be created by renowned muralist, painter, sculptor and scholar Manny Vega.

The launch of the Dr. Antonia Pantoja Mural Project (see flyer) will take place Thursday, Jan. 17, 2013, at 6 pm, in the auditorium of the Hunter College Silberman School of Social Work, 2180 Third Ave. at 119th St. The Mural Project was conceived in collaboration with Hunter College and its Center for Puerto Rican Studies. The upcoming event is the first in a series of community presentations related to the project.

The free event will feature the screening of filmmaker Lillian Jimenez’s critically acclaimed documentary Antonia Pantoja, ¡Presente! (2009), followed by a panel discussion with Vega and Jimenez. A limited edition engraving of Dr. Pantoja, created by Vega, will be sold to raise money for the Mural Project. In addition, copies of her memoir, Antonia Pantoja: Visionary, will be available for purchase at the event. Books will be provided by East Harlem’s own La Casa Azul Bookstore.
The Toni Pantoja Mural Committee is honored that Vega has agreed to make the mural a reality. Vega’s vibrant, inspiring and gorgeous work is conspicuous in East Harlem public spaces, notably inside the 110th Street and Lexington Avenue subway station and the recently unveiled street mosaic mural at 105th Street and Lexington Avenue. He also created the mural of poet Julia de Burgos at 106th Street and Lexington Avenue. Vega’s work has been shown at the Guggenheim Museum, El Museo del Barrio, the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth, Fowler Museum at UCLA and the Bronx Museum.

Dr. Pantoja was a social worker, civil rights worker and educational activist who made long-lasting contributions to the Latino community throughout the U.S. and was a 1996 Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient.

A passionate, indomitable leader, Dr. Pantoja (1922-2002) sought to empower Puerto Ricans and other Latinos through education, advocacy and the leadership development of its youth. Important Latino institutions emerged from her work: ASPIRA, established in New York in 1961 and now one of the largest national Latino non-profit education organizations in the U.S.; the National Puerto Rican Forum, which served as an incubator for organizations and programs promoting economic self-sufficiency; and Universidad Boricua, the precursor to Boricua College. She also created the Puerto Rican Research and Resources Center in Washington, D.C. in 1971.

Contact: Neyda Martinez  
Tel. (917) 399-6369

(Note: This event was originally scheduled for Thursday, Nov. 8, 2012, but was re-scheduled because of Hurricane Sandy.)
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