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Hope revived for 'Kiki' Camarena stamp

June 04, 2011 | By CHELCEY ADAMI | Staff Writer



IMPERIAL VALLEY PRESS FILE PHOTO

For 13 years, retired Redlands school teacher Diana Holly has tried to have a commemorative stamp issued honoring slain DEA Special Agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena's life, and until recently, she had nearly given up hope.

Holly recently received a letter saying that the Camarena stamp proposal is being considered by the United States Postal Service's Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee.

The Postal Service receives thousands of stamp subject proposals from the American public every year. The committee is made up of 14 people who review and then recommend about 20 stamp subjects to the postmaster general each year.

Once subjects are chosen, a lengthy stamp design process ensues. No one is notified what stamp subjects are approved for issuance until the public is notified.

While the 2012 and 2013 stamps have been chosen, the Camarena stamp is being considered for the 2014 or later years, Holly said.

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Her fifth-grade class originally sent in a proposal for a Camarena stamp in 1998. Holly isn't related to Camarena or knew him, but is devoted to the project.

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"It became very important to me as a teacher to make it real for the kids, knowing that there was a person that was fighting for this cause and sacrificed his life," she said. "One man was trying to make a difference. We should continue to help and should continue to remember him and not to forget."

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Holly had had no communication from the committee for three years and sent a letter in April inquiring about the Camarena stamp proposal status.

She had received letters before from the committee acknowledging the proposal, but nothing as positive as the letter that came a couple of weeks ago saying it was under consideration, she said.

Over the years, thousands of petitions and letters in support of the Camarena stamp have been sent by organizations, politicians and schools all over the nation.

Now retired, Holly still receives them and simply forwards them to the committee as they arrive.

"I asked that question, 'What else there is to do? I feel like we should do something completely extraordinary, but what is that?'" she said. "We're hoping that at the end of 13 years, I might get a letter saying, 'Ok we're going to get it.'"

John Windham, former DEA agent and member of The Enrique S. Camarena Educational Foundation Inc.'s advisory board, recently wrote a letter to the committee in favor of the Camarena stamp.

"When Enrique 'Kiki' Camarena was catching crooks that were killing our kids with illegal drugs, he never thought a postage stamp might help continue his work after he was gone," Windham wrote.

Camarena has been commemorated in numerous ways including the Red Ribbon Week campaign, bronze busts, clubs, scholarships and building names.

Camarena was born in Mexicali and graduated from Calexico High School in 1966. After serving with the U.S. Marine Corp. and working in both the Calexico and El Centro police departments, he joined the DEA in 1974.

He began working in Guadalajara, Mexico, in 1981 and in 1985, at age 37, Camarena was kidnapped, tortured and murdered. He is survived by his wife and three children.

"Mr. Camarena was a role model to a lot of young men and women in law enforcement and more importantly, a role model to the people in the area who honor him every year for Red Ribbon Week," said Calexico Mayor John Moreno. "We feel that this is a significant tribute to a man who gave his life to stop the influx of contraband into the country."

People can send letters of support for the Enrique Camarena stamp to the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee c/o Stamp Development, U.S. Postal Service, 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Room 3300, Washington D.C., 20260.

Staff Writer Chelcey Adami can be reached at 760-337-3452 or cadami@ivpressonline.com

BREAKOUT

Samples of the 14 major criteria guiding stamp subject selection:

- General policy is that U.S. postage stamps primarily will feature American or American-related subjects while other subjects can be considered if the subject had significant impact on American history or culture.
- No living person will be honored by portrayal on U.S. postage.
- Only events, persons and themes of widespread national appeal and significance will be considered for commemoration.
- Commemorative stamps honoring an individual won't be issued sooner than five years after the person's death. The only exception to this rule is the death of a U.S. president.

Source: U.S. Postal Service

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