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## USPS Celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month With Piñatas! Stamps

ROSWELL, NM — The U.S. Postal Service today kicked off Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept. 15-Oct.15) with new festive Piñatas! stamps at the 36th Annual Piñata Festival.

These Forever stamps come in four designs — two donkeys and two seven-pointed stars — celebrating the traditional Mexican fiesta favorite.

This is the third consecutive year the Postal Service has issued a Hispanic-themed stamp. In September 2021, USPS issued Day of the Dead stamps, and in July 2022, USPS issued Mariachi stamps.

News of the stamps is being shared with the hashtag **#PinatasStamps**.

“One of the reasons I feel proud to work at the Postal Service is because we are one of the nation’s oldest and most admired public service institutions. Part of that proud history is celebrating our multi-faceted heritage through stamps. Ours is truly a world culture, and our stamps allow us to weave together the many threads of our national tapestry, and piñatas are the perfect example of this,” said Isaac Cronkhite, chief processing and distribution officer and executive vice president, U.S. Postal Service, who served as the stamps’ dedicating official.

Other participants at the stamp ceremony were Juan P. Oropesa, City Councilor, Roswell, NM; Timothy Z. Jennings, Mayor of Roswell, NM; Alma Salas, Board President, Roswell Hispano Chamber of Commerce; Felipe Flores, Jr., Western Division, Senior Director of Processing Operations, U.S. Postal Service; Yesenia Prieto, Executive Director and Piñata Maker and Artist, Piñata Design Studio; and Emily Zaiden, Director and Curator, Craft in America Center.

### Background

Scholars believe piñatas might have their origins in China, where medieval European explorers described a New Year’s custom that sounds familiar to us today. A brightly decorated animal figurine was beaten

with a stick until it broke open, releasing the seeds contained in the hollow interior. After the remains of the vessel were burned, the ashes were gathered for good luck during the coming year.

By the 14th century in Italy, a similar practice — possibly imported from China by Marco Polo — became part of festivities during the season of Lent. Rather than the brightly adorned figure that featured in the Chinese ceremonies, the Italians used an undecorated clay vessel called the pignatta (“fragile pot”), which was filled with sweets rather than seeds. As the custom migrated to Spain, breaking the pignatta — piñata in Spanish — evolved into a form of celebration on the first Sunday in Lent. The piñata came to the New World with Christian missionaries in the 16th century.

At the time of the Spanish arrival in what is now Mexico, the Indigenous people had their own traditions. The Aztecs, for example, decorated clay pots with feathers and filled them with small gifts. After hanging clay pots in front of statues of their gods, they struck the pots with sticks until the vessels broke and the treasures inside fell to the ground as offerings.

Spanish missionaries combined these ceremonies with their own Lenten tradition to attract Christian converts. Used as religious instruction, the piñata represented the devil and temptation. The blindfolded “player” symbolized blind faith armed with the stick of goodness; breaking open the piñata showed the triumph of good over evil.

Today, the piñata is still an important part of many celebrations in Mexico and the United States, and the custom has spread to other countries. Piñatas feature in all manner of festivities: holidays, birthdays, anniversaries and weddings. They are a traditional part of the posadas, a nine-day festival held in early December that commemorates Mary and Joseph’s journey to Bethlehem before the birth of Jesus.

Historically, the piñata-maker — called the piñatero or piñatera — began with a clay pot as the base, which was covered with shredded paper and engrudo (a paste made from water and flour or cornstarch).

The design emerged as the maker attached cones and other forms to the prepared pot. Gluing strips of curled and cut tissue paper over the entire structure, the artist turned the clay vessel into a swan or a bull or a seven-point star — almost anything imaginable. Today, a traditionally crafted piñata might begin with a frame made of reeds tied with string; a homemade piñata sometimes uses a balloon as the base. Whether mass-produced, handcrafted by artisans or made at home, piñatas are easily found to fit any occasion or taste.

The customs surrounding piñatas today are very similar to those from centuries ago. Filled with treats and presents, the piñata hangs by ropes that can be manipulated to move up, down or sideways. A blindfolded player tries to strike the piñata with a stick while the rope is pulled to make a direct hit more difficult. Each player takes a turn until one breaks the piñata, scattering its contents on the ground to be gathered up by all the participants. Though the meaning of breaking the piñata has evolved, the result is still the same: bounty for all.

## **Stamp Art**

The stamp art features four digital illustrations of two traditional piñata designs — a donkey and a seven-pointed star. The bright, saturated color palette was inspired by Mexican culture, including the vibrant colors of small-town houses, traditional hand-sewn dresses, handmade toys and flowers, and classic piñatas themselves. The donkey illustrations are set against either a pink or orange background; the stars feature either a purple or green background. The background colors add to the exuberant and celebratory feel of the stamps.

Víctor Meléndez created the original art and designed the stamps. Antonio Alcalá was the art director.

The Piñatas! stamps are being issued in booklets of 20 stamps. These Forever stamps will always be equal in value to the current First-Class Mail 1-ounce price.

## **Postal Products**

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