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**First Place® AZ Hires 40-Year Phoenix Advertising Veteran to Serve as
Director of the Mulzet Center for Expression at the First Place Global Leadership Institute**

***Global Leadership Institute Hires Development Director
with Decades of Service with Arizona Charities***

PHOENIX (April 4, 2023) — First Place AZ has hired Tom Ortega to serve as director of the Mulzet Center for Expression at the [Global Leadership Institute](#). Ortega served as RIESTER's chief creative officer for more than 20 years.

For the autism and neurodiverse community, Ortega shines a bright light on self-expression, community successes and pressing issues through various art forms to influence minds, hearts and public policy. The First Place Global Leadership Institute is part of First Place AZ, an Arizona nonprofit with the vision of ensuring housing, healthcare and community options are as bountiful for people with autism and other neurodiversities as they are for everyone else.

Prior to joining First Place AZ, Ortega was chief creative officer and partner at RIESTER, an independent advertising agency with offices in Phoenix, Los Angeles, Park City and Washington, D.C. He oversaw the ideation and development of all creative campaigns. His career has also included various creative positions with Phillips-Ramsey/McCann-Erickson in Phoenix and several firms in Texas.

"I have always cherished opportunities to do work that impacts lives in positive ways. The autism community and First Place have been near and dear to me for many years," says Ortega. "The opportunity to share these amazing stories and work with such smart, passionate people is a true privilege."

Ortega has earned numerous creative honors, including Communication Arts Advertising and

Design Annuals, Graphis International Advertising Annual and Radio Mercury Awards. He has received various local, regional and national ADDY awards, including Copywriter of the Year twice, Creative Director of the Year and, most recently, Ad Person of the Year.

A contemporary artist, Ortega's paintings and sculptures have been exhibited regionally and internationally. His work has been included in various publications.

Ortega holds a bachelor's degree in advertising from Texas Tech University. He has been a past sponsor of SARRC's Annual Community Breakfast and championed employing interns on the autism spectrum. He previously served on the board for First Place AZ.

Before joining First Place AZ as director of development, Sarah Amaral worked in development and organized events for various charities over the last two decades, including JDRF, Junior Achievement of Arizona and the American Lung Association of Arizona.

Amaral has also been a member of many Phoenix civic groups, including Suns Charities 88 and Valley of the Sun Active 20-30 Club. She currently sits on boards of the State Forty-Eight Foundation and the Greater Phoenix Chamber's Young Professionals.

"I'm excited to be a part of First Place and make lasting and impactful change, not only here in Phoenix but globally," says Amaral. "Being part of this dynamic team that is a catalyst for advancing inclusive communities and independence for adults with neurodiversities makes me incredibly proud."

Amaral is a graduate of Arizona State University where she earned a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies with a focus on nonprofit management and human development. She is also a certified nonprofit professional through the ASU Lodestar Center.

"Tom and Sarah are strategic hires for the First Place Global Leadership Institute, which serves as a multidisciplinary, hands-on training center for professionals, educators, researchers, support staff and healthcare professionals," says Denise D. Resnik, First Place AZ founder and president/CEO, and mother of an adult son with autism. "Through model properties, data collection and the sharing of our stories, the Institute is informing supportive public policy for more significant impact on the special populations we serve. Tom and Sarah's roles are critical in helping the broader community appreciate and better understand current and future challenges and opportunities."

For more information or to get involved, email info@firstplaceaz.org or visit [firstplaceaz.org](https://www.firstplaceaz.org).

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About First Place® AZ

First Place AZ, a charitable 501(c)(3), is advancing innovative residential and community options for adults with autism and other neurodiversities through its vision for fueling a new wave of

real estate and community development. First Place–Phoenix, the nonprofit’s flagship property, is an 81,000-square-foot apartment community set in the heart of the urban area and recognized by PBS NewsHour as “[the most autism-friendly city in the world.](#)” The First Place Global Leadership Institute leverages this award-winning property to serve as an R&D site, supporting the replication of residential and post-secondary education models and fostering collaboration among the public, private, philanthropic and nonprofit sectors. Learn more at firstplaceaz.org.