



City of Arts & Innovation

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Mayor's Innovation Award Goes to Creative Team Behind @inlandempire

Mark Menezes and Justin Hudson use social media to showcase the region and local businesses

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – Mayor Patricia Lock Dawson is presenting the 2024 Mayor's Innovation Award to Mark Menezes and Justin Hudson, the creative team behind the @inlandempire Instagram page that uses social media to highlight and celebrate small businesses.

“Mark and Justin have captured the imagination of the region with their insightful and fun videos that highlight the depth of Inland Southern California,” Lock Dawson said. “Their innovative approach to social media helps bring our diverse region together.”

The award will be presented Thursday (1/25) during the annual State of the City address, themed “Riverside in Motion,” at the Riverside Convention Center. Registration and networking begin at 4:30 p.m., with the program scheduled for 5:30 p.m.

The Greater Riverside Chambers of Commerce produces the event in partnership with the City of Riverside. The event is streamed on RiversideTV and the City's social media channels. More information can be found [here](#). To buy a ticket or explore sponsorship opportunities, go [here](#).

Menezes, who grew up in Riverside and moved back from the East Coast about six years ago, said @inlandempire has attracted 19,000 followers in just four months. He and Hudson post three times a week from all over the Inland area, including a recent two-part episode on the successful home kitchen Cali Tardka in Orangecrest.

“It's grown really quickly,” Menezes said. “The results are just really amazing.”

His own Instagram page -- @markfromriverside – attracted nearly 48,000 followers over 18 months, but he expects the @inlandempire page to eventually surpass that.

“The Inland Empire is so big, we're covering from Ontario to Temecula to the desert,” Menezes said. “We have such a bigger group of people to pull from.”

Menezes and Hudson teamed up after Menezes hosted Hudson as a guest on a podcast from the Made store on Magnolia Avenue.

“We had a lot in common right away,” Menezes said. “We joke around a lot, and that really played into the chemistry of it.”

Hudson is a successful entrepreneur who created the 1LoveIE clothing line of hats, shirts and jackets available at the Galleria at Tyler, Victoria Gardens and [online](#). He had held the @inlandempire account name for years before launching it with Menezes.

“He’s doing amazing things highlighting Riverside on his own page,” Hudson said. “I thought, ‘Let’s take that energy to the entire IE.’ We’re spotlighting our community and seeing people come together.”

The shows are unscripted, humorous and evolve from the interaction of the two hosts as they explore restaurants around the area and enthuse over their favorite dishes. The shows seek to highlight the beauty of the region and highlight mom-and-pop establishments.

“We’re sharing the stories of the folks behind the restaurants, the people making the food,” Hudson said. “I really consider myself a son of Riverside, and an ambassador for the Inland Empire, and I take great pride in representing Riverside. So, to get this award, it means a lot to me.”