

# SJDA searches for next CEO

A nationwide search is underway to find the next leader of San Jose Downtown Association (SJDA) as its founding CEO **Scott Knies** leaves the organization after 34 years.

Knies will step down Nov. 1, 2022, as first revealed publicly in the organization's Stabilization Plan released in August 2020.

"We've been succession planning for several years," said **Alan "Gumby" Marques**, president of the SJDA Board of Directors and owner of Heroes Martial Arts. "Scott exits prior to the November elections and our new CEO will start together with the next mayor."

SJDA originated from a group of downtown business owners who saw a need for an organization to protect their interests as streets and sidewalks were torn up for transportation and development projects. When Knies opened the organization's first office in March 1988 in Fountain Alley, most public sector downtown decisions were made — or fueled by — the San Jose Redevelopment Agency. With SJDA representation, business, resident and property owner voices grew more forceful in the decisions that would shape downtown's future.

Under Knies's guidance, SJDA started as a leader in downtown marketing, promotions and business advocacy. The organization started the Music in the Park summer concert series in 1989 and has introduced many new events over the years including the America Festival Fourth of July fireworks show; the

SharkByte art sculpture and charity auction; the Brew Ha Ha comedy festival; SoFA Street Fair; Music in the Other Park; Dine Downtown Restaurant Week; Starlight Cinemas outdoor movies; Downtown Farmers' Market; and the Downtown Ice skating rink.

SJDA has contributed to major initiatives that have helped San Jose fulfill its aspiration to become Silicon Valley's city center, including BART subway planning; maximizing building heights downtown; Google's plans for Downtown West; free parking in city-owned garages; light rail station design; and more recently supporting policies and funding to help businesses recover from the pandemic.

"Scott has been a tireless advocate and friend to all businesses," said **Steve Borkenhagen**, a SJDA founding board member and current president of San Jose Rotary. "He has always listened to the concerns of small businesses and done his best to make our still fragile downtown better. His proactive work with the powers-that-be have always been deeply appreciated."

Community leaders have come to value Knies's annual State of the Downtown (October) and Year in Review (December) presentations, applauding his ability to distill and communicate the challenges,

opportunities and efforts of involving diverse stakeholders in the growth of downtown. A former newspaper reporter, Knies is editor of *Downtown Dimension*, with a monthly circulation of 2,000 issues printed and mailed, and 3,000 digital subscribers.

SJDA has demonstrated the ability to develop innovative projects that enhance street life. Examples include building an iconic seasonal skating rink encircled by 32 palm trees; adding the SoFA Pocket Park and Hart's Dog Park to the urban landscape; and constructing the MOMENT shops into the Market San Pedro Square Garage to activate both sides of San Pedro Street and provide storefronts for retail entrepreneurs. The Downtown Doors program established in 2003 has earned national acclaim for providing more than 300 high school artists with funding and a platform to have their art prominently displayed throughout downtown.

In addition to the land use side of development advocacy, SJDA's eye for constantly improving the downtown built environment extends into a Downtown Design Committee. This group of architects and designers assess proposed development projects using 11 design criteria and providing expert feedback to developers and planners. The very best projects are bestowed with SJDA's annual Golden Nail Award.

For many, SJDA's most successful initiative is the addition of the Property-Based Improvement District (PBID) which resulted in Groundwerx, leading

downtown San Jose into a new era of cleaner streets, business development, healthier urban forest and overall beautification. Started in 2008 and renewed in 2012, the PBID is currently in the formal process of expanding and renewing services for another 10 years through 2032. The renewal is expected to be completed in June.

In addition to another 10 years of PBID property assessment district funding, SJDA also manages the downtown Business Improvement District. SJDA owns its 10th floor office at 28 N. First Street, opened a ground floor Business Support Center on Third Street in October, received a \$1 million Knight Foundation five-year grant in November and revealed a new organizational brand design in December.

"The new CEO is going to inherit some assets — none greater than our current Downtown Association staff and volunteer Board members," Knies said.

One point of pride for Knies is the number of former SJDA employees who have moved on to leadership positions in organizations that serve the downtown community, including Guadalupe River Park Conservancy, San Jose Chamber of Commerce, City of San Jose, Urban Vibrancy Institute, VTA, Veggielution, School of Arts and Culture at Mexican Heritage Plaza, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library, and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

For more information about the SJDA CEO position, see [sjdowntown.com/careers](http://sjdowntown.com/careers). Applications are due April 22.



Scott Knies

## New day, time for Farmers' Market

The Downtown San Jose Farmers' Market returns May 4 to SoFA — albeit on a new block — for another season, with a day and time change.



The market will be open Wednesdays from 3-7 p.m. through Nov. 16 along South First Street between San Carlos and San Salvador streets. Last year, the market occupied the SoFA block between San Salvador and William streets.

"We're hoping day and time changes will be a better fit for our residents and returning office workers this season," said **Donna Butcher**, SJDA events and

promotions manager. "We're trying to achieve the maximum benefit for both shoppers and farmers."

The market moved to SoFA last season from San Pedro Street, which had been the location for 20 years and has been used for *al fresco* dining since COVID restricted indoor dining in 2020. Though the SoFA location started with a bang in 2021, attendance from customers and farmers waned as the Delta and Omicron variants disrupted the week-to-week market momentum.

From 10-15 certified California growers affiliated with Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association combine with another 10-15 artisans selling hand-made and homemade items. Excite Credit Union and Kaiser Permanente have once again stepped up to support the Downtown Farmers' Market.

Details are at [sjdowntown.com/downtown-farmers-market](http://sjdowntown.com/downtown-farmers-market).

## Music in the Park changeover

A new producer plans to bring Music in the Park outdoor concerts to Plaza de Cesar Chavez this summer June 17, July 15 and Aug. 19.

Downtown-based entertainment industry veteran and entrepreneur **Mauricio Mejia** takes over from San Jose Downtown Association after 30 years with plans to build on Music in the Park's legacy.

The spinoff of the event was a key recommendation of SJDA's 2020 Stabilization Plan, which repositions the priorities of the organization.

Downtown soars with vitality on Music in the Park nights.

"We're always busy when big events happen across the street," said **Jeremy Toste**, general manager of The Grill on the Alley. "The guests are always new, mostly from out of town, and excited to find us here. Everyone is having fun."

"Music in the Park always means a second wave of dinner customers," added **Tyler Donnellan** of the Old Spaghetti Factory.

The popular series began in 1989 and expanded to 13 shows per



Downtown is abuzz on Music in the Park nights.

season between Plaza and St. James Parks before SJDA paused the free concerts in 2012. Music in the Park returned as a gated and ticketed event in 2013, and took another forced break in 2020 due to COVID.

Realtor **Georgie Huff** of Capital Properties said she appreciates the shows are scheduled on weeknights when she's not so busy.

"A lot of my clients are new

to the area. I've been bringing them to Music in the Park since the first year," she said.

Fans who bookmark the [sjdowntown.com/music-in-the-park](http://sjdowntown.com/music-in-the-park) page will be redirected to the new website at [mitpsj.com](http://mitpsj.com). Mejia will announce the performers shortly after they are booked.

"We are delighted to transfer Music in the Park to a local producer that loves downtown San Jose as much as we do," said **Scott Knies**, SJDA CEO. "We look forward to assisting the new production team and playing a support role in the success of this beloved concert series."

Follow the concerts on Facebook: @mitpsj; Instagram: @mitpdtjs; and Twitter: @mitpdtjs. Email [info@mitpsj.com](mailto:info@mitpsj.com).



**Ballots next step for PBID Renewal:** Owners representing more than one-half of the property downtown have signed petitions to fund the Property-Based Improvement District (PBID) services for the next 10 years.

As of March 11, PBID Renewal petitions representing 63 percent of district assessments were received, meaning the City of San Jose city clerk can proceed with sending ballots out to all property owners for a final vote.

California employs a two-step process to approve Property-Based Improvement Districts. Following the petition step, more than 50 percent of property owners who return ballots must approve the PBID in order for it to be renewed another 10 years.

A City Council memo will be posted April 12, followed by a resolution of intent April 19. The ballots will appear in the mail at the property owners' address of record after April 22. Ballots will be accepted until the City Council tallies the ballots at its June 7 meeting.

The PBID is a special district where property is assessed to fund specific downtown improvements. The Downtown San Jose PBID services include sidewalk scrubbing, uniformed security patrols, tree trimming, beautification, projects such as planters and murals, resources for businesses and outreach to unhoused individuals.

A governing board of property owners oversees the budget and management plan.

**Joy in cinema April 1-17:** Cinequest's Cinejoy virtual film festival April 1-17 will feature 132 films and television events, including 82 world and U.S. premieres. The event also includes screening parties and 15 live spotlight events, both with audience-meets-artists interactions.

Created for the pandemic, Cinequest's organizers plan to extend Cinejoy's virtual experience beyond the pandemic.

"Nothing can replace meeting up after a movie event in a downtown venue, but we found that we could have exhilarating experiences during COVID," said **Halidan Hussey**, Cinequest founder. "Cinejoy brings people the joy of humanity and the joy of cinema."

Film-viewers can choose movies through genres or by emotions, picking from categories such as dazzlers, good times, illuminations, inspiration, laughs, love, mindbenders and thrills.

The in-person Cinequest event, held in pre-COVID years in February and March, is planned for August with film announcements in June. Visit [cinequest.org](http://cinequest.org)

**State targets I-280-Almaden for cleanup:** One of 126 projects to remove litter, clean up and beautify areas around California's highways will target the area under Interstate 280 at Almaden Boulevard.

The San Jose-Almaden beautification plans include installed and improved sidewalks, fencing and buffered planting areas between the sidewalk and street. In addition, the area will include infrastructure to provide safe storage facilities for unsheltered individuals and spaces for community gardens.

Residents of the Market-Almaden Neighborhood (MANA) have complained for more than a decade about the eyesore under the freeway which is managed by Caltrans

On Feb. 14, Gov. **Gavin Newsom** announced the 126 projects and \$1 billion in spending on litter abatement, and local and state beautification projects over the next two-three years. Two other San Jose projects will focus on sections of I-680 and Highway 101. Total budget for the San Jose projects is \$3.25 million. For information, visit [cleancalifornia.dot.ca.gov](http://cleancalifornia.dot.ca.gov).

**Opening day at Con Azucar.** **Con Azucar opens to rave reviews:** One look at the lines outside Con Azucar at Third and Santa Clara streets makes it clear the new business has found a sweet spot with downtowners. Not surprising when you consider that *con azucar* translates into English as “with sugar.”

Open only a month at 101 E. Santa Clara St., this coffee house and cafe features a menu of classic hot and iced coffee drinks with the option to add Mexican syrups such as Tres Leches, Cajeta, and Horchata. Besides iced coffee drinks, they also feature iced drinks like Tamarindo Lemonade (Tamarindo, Lemonade and a chamoy dip) and Pepino Con Limon (cucumber and lime with a chamoy rim).

The lunch menu includes new takes on classics such as grilled cheese, BLT, and club sandwiches, plus avocado and Caprese toast. The sole dessert item is a decadent Concha sandwich, which allows you to choose a flavor of Concha sweet bread, add ice cream, and a sauce of your choosing. The tasty offerings are the star attraction at Concha Azucar, but that didn't keep owners **Victor and Alex Garcia** from going big on interior decor that inspires posting on social media. Celebrity portraits (like **Selena** or **Tupak**) in foam in your cappuccino are also worth sharing a picture.



**Michelle, left, and Conchita**

jewelry in a wide array of styles," said the sisters, who come from a family of jewelers and started selling their products online ([bohemianmoonart.com](http://bohemianmoonart.com)) and Etsy, ([bohemianmoonart.etsy.com](http://bohemianmoonart.etsy.com)) before opening in the MOMENT stores in San Pedro Square on March 5.

The sisters said they are “beyond excited” to get to the point of having brick-and-mortar retail space. “This has been the culmination of years of hard work and dedication,” Michelle said. “Our customers have been very supportive and we’re very thankful to find a bigger place.”

**Joel Ramirez**, Groundwerx Employee of the Month for a second time, is also a competitive dancer. He loves salsa the most, and his favorite downtown event is Salsa Night at City Dance. In 2019, he finished third at a national competition in Provo, Utah.

But competitive dance doesn't pay the bills or help support his family, so in 2019 he recalibrated his personal goals and joined Groundwrex. From time to time, Joel will give his Groundwrex co-workers dance tips and quick lessons, but more importantly, dance has taught Joel to focus, be disciplined and technique-minded, and step up to help build a stronger team at work.

Just as he does with the San Jose State dance-sport team he joined, Joel fills in as a backup for his coaches and supervisors. He has trained each safety ambassador on the current staff. This year, he is learning to juggle safety duties and backup duties.

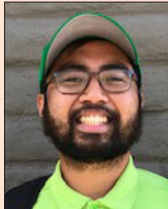
On any given day, he fills in as backup pressure-washer and helps out removing graffiti tags, checks on homeless individuals and refers them to PATH and the Recovery Café. He patrols downtown looking for issues needing resolution. When he has three or more things to do at once, he'll check in with his supervisor for prioritization assistance.

"I'm going to do this work no matter what, so I might as well do it well and efficiently," he said. "I'm doing more and more on my own accord. I ask supervisors what else needs to be done. This helps the organization complete work more efficiently."

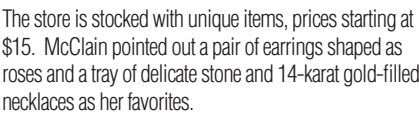
In a previous job, he sold ballroom dance shoes and credits his customer service experience for knowing how to make people feel comfortable. He'll take extraordinary lengths to provide assistance. Once, he gave a spare pair of pants to a homeless person with mobility issues.

Joel has become a big fan of downtown San Jose since moving here in 2014 to attend school at SJSU. He has tried almost every food and beverage place in downtown, he said, and is quick to offer his favorites: Gyu Kaku for dine-in, Original Gravity for burgers. He gets excited for business openings, especially the places that add new activities such as axe-throwing or arcade games.

"I know that if my recommendations bring even one person downtown, it's a win," he said. "I just want empty storefronts filled."



**Joel Ramirez**



For safety protocols, visit [tabardtheatre.org/covid-protocols](https://tabardtheatre.org/covid-protocols).  
Register via Zoom Webinar at [tinyurl.com/april15mtg](https://tinyurl.com/april15mtg).

Meeting co-sponsors include The Tabard Theatre Company, Nirvana Soul and Pinnacle Peak Advisors LLC.

**10 years ago - April 2012** – San Jose Downtown Foundation's Downtown Doors program received a jolt of energy from the National Endowment for the Arts, which awarded the student art competition and exhibition a \$25,000 grant, the first of two major national recognitions of the Doors program in 2012.

**15 years ago - April 2007** – Barry Swenson Builder's City Heights high-rise residential tower, 175 W. St. James St., held its grand opening. Twenty-two of the 104 condos were already reserved.

**20 years ago - April 2002** — The city amended a decades-old policy to take economic impact into account when booking downtown's city-owned theaters. The change allowed both the San Jose Dance Company and the Ballet San Jose Silicon Valley to conduct shows downtown instead of forcing them to perform their 24 shows to 40,000 ticket-holders in Cupertino.

**30 years ago – April 1992** – Pedicabs, “bicycle-driven open-air carriages that comfortably seat two people plus their packages,” started appearing on downtown streets.

**Operating Cost Per Revenue Car Hour**

- VTA has the highest cost per revenue car hour in the nation
- Operating cost per car hour is the total operating budget divided by the sum of total hours light rail cars are operating revenue service (a 2-car train operating for one hour would count as 2 hours for these calculations).

**National Average**

City	Operator Related Costs	Other Staff Related Costs	Parts and Materials	All other Costs	Total
Denver	20	80	10	50	160
San Diego	20	70	20	60	170
Minneapolis	20	120	10	30	180
Salt Lake City	20	100	30	40	190
Charlotte	30	110	10	80	230
Portland	30	150	30	50	260
Houston	30	190	20	40	280
Boston	80	170	10	30	290
Cleveland	40	170	20	60	310
Baltimore	60	130	20	90	310
Sacramento	30	170	20	80	310
Buffalo	30	150	20	120	320
St. Louis	30	160	20	90	320
San Francisco	80	220	20	40	360
Dallas	30	260	20	70	380
Hampton	40	180	20	110	390
Pittsburgh	60	310	20	40	430
Newark	80	310	20	60	470
Seattle	30	260	20	160	470
Los Angeles	40	240	20	190	490
San Jose	60	320	50	140	570

Legend: Operator Related Costs, Other Staff Related Costs, Parts and Materials, All other Costs

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**Source: Valley Transportation Authority (VTA)**