

# Reopening

## Sighs of relief; businesses move forward

With COVID-19 vaccinations in plentiful quantity the state fulfilled its promise to reopen California for tourists and businesses June 15, lifting much of the uncertainty felt since March 2020 but raising questions about what happens next for downtown San Jose businesses.

After 15 months of struggle, the state's tiered system of capacity restrictions is over. Those vaccinated can take off their masks for most activities, and social distancing is needed only in crowded conditions.

New businesses are opening after a long wait, such as Nova restaurant and lounge on Second Street, Rec Room on San Fernando Street, San Pedro Social on Santa Clara Street and Guildhouse on South First Street.

The Blanco event venue in San Pedro Square opened in May and has already hosted 10 events, including five weddings. On the first weekend after June 15, Blanco hosted a wedding with 125 people.

"We were able to do these events because we have an open air top deck," said **Mike Messenger**, who has an interest in several San Pedro Square businesses including Blanco. "Now the floodgates have opened and demand is way up. People who got married during Covid are ready for their receptions and booking inside."

The newcomers join existing businesses that managed to stay open during the pandemic and other new businesses like Nirvana Soul, Petiscos, Good Spot, The Shop by Chef Baca and Plantlush that dared to open during the Covid times.

"Nowhere is the resilience of our small-business community better exemplified than in the our members who shifted their operations, adapted to take-out, al fresco and mask protocols -- and opened new storefronts despite the pandemic," said **Scott Knies**, SJDA executive director.

Downtown's arts, culture and entertainment venues are revving back up after more than a year of complete closures. Theaters and galleries are back in business, literally regaining their "footing" alongside actors, dancers and musicians preparing their next performances.

All four downtown museums -- Children's Discovery Museum, The Tech Interactive, San Jose Museum of Art and San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles -- are open again. 3Below Theater is showing first-run movies and SAP Center has concerts returning in August. Bars, clubs and entertainment venues, among the last businesses allowed to reopen for indoor operations, are also turning their lights back on.

While the long-term outlook is trending positive, it's going to take most of the summer and then some for conventions, students and office workers to rebound to pre-pandemic levels. Students at San Jose State University will return in August for the fall semester at 60 percent capacity on campus. The Convention Center has booked SiliCon with **Adam Savage** for Aug. 28-29, providing hope that occupancy rates will start climbing at downtown hotels.

There is no question downtown, with its concentration of offices, hospitality business and proximity to SJSU, was impacted far greater by the Covid shutdowns than the rest of San Jose. City officials recently reported an overall sales tax drop last year of 20 percent citywide, and a nearly 50 percent plunge downtown.

Some employees have already returned to their downtown offices, but the majority of office businesses, including San Jose City Hall, are using the summer to reopen.

Without the office worker business, Mezcal owner **Adolfo Gomez** said that even though his restaurant is fully staffed, there are not enough people downtown during the day, which may force him to temporarily close for lunch.



People can now gather each week to hear (408) Collective at LVL UP.

"We should expect the return of office workers to be different from before, a hybrid model where they work part of the time at home and part of the time at the office," said **Nate LeBlanc**, SJDA's business development manager. "Hopefully people returning to work downtown will want to support the local economy by buying something, having a meal or getting a drink on the days they are downtown -- we missed a year of doing that."

Several downtown employers confirmed they can't wait to get back into the office. Gensler Architects has reopened using a phased approach, reaching 50 percent in July and 100 percent in August, said **Brian Corbett**, studio director.

KBM-Hogue will be in the office three days a week starting Sept. 13. "We look forward to the mentoring, collaboration, innovation, and social benefits a return to workplace will offer," said **Stan Vuckovich**, CEO. Corbett confirmed their employees are all in when it comes to supporting the local economy.

"The purpose and value of our office and our downtown has never been clearer -- it is all about places that foster much-needed human connection and socialization," Corbett said. "Supporting the local economy is top of mind. Even while we are not in the office, we schedule our get-togethers and events at downtown bars and restaurants."

Festivals and events are being booked at lightning pace. The first big event back, fittingly, was Juneteenth. Also in June, Make Music Day and a streamed and live version of SoFA Fair. San Jose Jazz Summerfest will be Aug. 13-15, featuring **Morris Day and the Time**, along with Music in the Park favorites **Pete Escovedo** and **Ozomatli**. South First Fridays and STREET MRKT will take place in August, September and October.

Was Music in the Park mentioned? Yes! Save the date, Aug. 27.

Broadway San Jose comes back with "Hamilton" Oct. 12-31 and nine other traveling productions. Among SAP Center's opening concerts are **Harry Styles** Aug. 20 and **Guns 'N' Roses** Aug. 25. At the San Jose Civic Auditorium: **Joe Bonamassa** July 30. **Il Divo** is at the Center for the Performing Arts Aug. 12. Mubadala Silicon Valley Classic with top-ranked women tennis stars is Aug. 2-8 at San Jose State.

With the recovery momentum building throughout the summer, businesses have a chance to ramp up and hone their operations. Top-of-mind for some is hiring, rehiring, training new workers and protecting experienced staff. Some businesses have raised wages and emphasized a safe working environment to retain and attract employees.

With "hiring now" signs up in many restaurants, SJDA has created a virtual job board to help small businesses ramp up. Find it at

sjdowntown.com/downtown-jobs, Downtowner Online and in the weekly stream of Facebook posts @sjdowntown.

Businesses continue to grapple with state, county and city policies around masks, parklets and alcohol service.

**Masks** -- On the honor system, those unvaccinated still need to wear their masks. Restaurants and coffee shops are mostly playing it safe and require everyone -- including workers -- to wear masks into their establishments. Enoteca La Storia has their mask guidelines at the top of its website home page and an updated Web page of details.

"We're tired of being the mask police and updating multiple platforms (website, Yelp, Google, etc.) with evolving information," said **Miyuki One Bear**, Enoteca general manager.

Academic Coffee's not ready to rely on the mask honor system and is doing the same thing, said **Frank Nguyen**, owner. Still, there's something odd about wearing a mask until a customer gets the coffee, at which time they can take it off, vaccinated or not, LeBlanc noted.

Ultimately, businesses need to make sure all their customers feel comfortable, which will require adjustments over time to mask and distancing policies, LeBlanc advised.

**Al Fresco dining** -- San Jose's Al Fresco dining program expires Dec. 31 and many City Council members and restaurants have used the term "Al

Fresco forever" to draft a policy for just that because it's good for business and customers feel more comfortable regardless of vaccination status. Primary locations for Al Fresco dining downtown are San Pedro and Post streets. While that takes its course, LeBlanc said he would be working with those who added parklets, such as on the Paseo and along San Fernando and South First streets, enhancing them and making them more permanent. LeBlanc will also advocate for allowing businesses to place tables on sidewalks in front of businesses.

"That shouldn't be a radical change," LeBlanc said. "During the 15 months, it felt normal. People should be sitting out in good weather."

**ABC drinks to go** -- According to an Alcoholic Beverage Control poll, 58 percent of customers said the option to buy a drink and bring it home with a meal helped them make decisions where to call out for orders during the pandemic. That rule and other more lenient regulations for alcohol are set to expire Dec. 31, so ABC will consider extensions. On June 30, some provisions were rescinded, including alcohol beverage returns, retail-to-retail transactions, delivery hours to midnight and hours of operations for retail sales. Check [abc.ca.gov/eighth-notice-of-regulatory-relief](http://abc.ca.gov/eighth-notice-of-regulatory-relief).

One Bear said that there are more important considerations right now than take-out cocktails.

"To-go and delivery are way down since things have loosened up. People want to be out of their homes," she said.

**In with the new ops** -- Businesses will continue to innovate and update their operations, such as online ordering, touchless menus and payments. "I don't think there is any point in going backwards after all the effort we put into making these things go live," One Bear said.

In the offices, businesses are sorting out how to make everyone safe and comfortable.

"We will be supportive of hybrid work a few days per week for individuals who need that flexibility," Corbett said. "Still, we value the power of in-person collaboration and human connection, so we will encourage our teams to be in the office. The specifics of how this will work are still under development."

One more big change initiated last year is parking. The validation program is gone and in its place is 90 Minutes of Free parking in five ParkSJ garages. See [ParkSJ.org](http://ParkSJ.org).

For industry changes and funding opportunities at all government levels, check SJDA's Thursday message to businesses, which has covered and provided links since March 2020 of all the major changes and grants available at the local, county, state and federal levels. Sign up by emailing **Jessica Vuong** at [jvuong@sjdowntown.com](mailto:jvuong@sjdowntown.com).

# New 'urban oasis' in SoFA

Downtown San Jose property owners have created the SoFA Pocket Park, a unique combination of dog park and demonstration garden, that celebrated its grand opening June 30.

"We have turned a blighted parking lot into a positive public space," said **Chris Friese**, a board member for the downtown Property-Based Improvement District (PBID). "It's not common for a new park to open anywhere — much less a park in an urban setting — and even less common that it is entirely privately funded."

SoFA Pocket Park is located at 540 S. First St. in the lot behind the former Emile's restaurant. It features:

- ◆ Separate play areas for big and small dogs, with artificial turf, double-entry gate, benches and basic dog amenities.
  - ◆ Demonstration garden by Veggielution with raised planter beds, farm stand, and spaces for workshops, food trucks and pop-up events. Veggielution is a non-profit community farm in East San Jose expanding its presence downtown to generate opportunities for its food entrepreneur incubator program.
  - ◆ Murals of quilts facing the park on the side of the San Jose Quilt and Textile Museum, curated by the museum and Local Color.
- "The designs of eight artists reflect world textile traditions and San Jose's diverse community, including Chinese, LatinX, African-American, Native American and Southeast Asian cultures," said **Nancy Bavor**, Quilts and Textiles Museum director.
- ◆ Vestaboard messaging display similar to the arrival and departure boards in European train stations.



SoFA Pocket Park — blighted parking lot turns into urban oasis. Image by Topa.

- ◆ Reused granite orbs salvaged by Garden City Construction from the former fountain in front of the San Jose Convention Center before the center was expanded. Garden City placed most of the orbs in its revision of Parque de los Pobladores and gave the leftovers to the Pocket Park located across the street. While the SoFA District is known for its mix of galleries, performance arts venues, and restaurants, it has in recent years added several large apartment buildings such as The Grad, The Pierce, Sparq and One38. "Lots of our new residents have dogs and everyone is going to love the synergy with the garden that Veggielution is creating," said **Scott Knies**, executive director of the San Jose Downtown Association, which manages the PBID. "Our goal was to create a little oasis in the midst of downtown that will offer some pleasurable respite and be welcoming to everyone." The park will be maintained by the PBID, Groundwerx and Veggielution and is open from 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Project sponsors include Urban Community, Urban Catalyst, Santa Clara County Association of Realtors, Vestaboard, Topa Architecture, Hamilton Builders, JJ Perez Paving, Google and the Knight Foundation.

## Downtown News

**Long and winding space:** Bjarke Ingels Group's famed Serpentine Pavilion will make its way to the Valley Title parking lot in SoFA starting in September. The innovative temporary events center will come to San Jose courtesy of Westbank, which is partnering with Urban Community on several major developments around downtown.



Serpentine Pavilion winds its way to SJ.

Westbank, which owns the structure resembling an unzipped wall, plans to have multiple events inside the Serpentine, including performances, movie screenings, fashion shows, design charrettes, artist talks, speaker series, workshops and private events. The pavilion may also be used to showcase the mixed-use office, housing and retail projects Westbank and Urban Community plan to bring to San Jose. Visit [westbank.com](http://westbank.com) to see what Westbank has in development for San Jose.

The Serpentine is planning for a Labor Day opening and will be up for six-to-eight months. Bjarke Ingels Group created the pavilion for the Serpentine Gallery and built it in London's Kensington Gardens in 2016. It has also been on display in the King West area of Toronto. It is made of more than 1,800 stacked fiberglass

boxes.

**Bjarke Ingels** is architect of the Bank of Italy renovation and the adjacent Energy Hub project proposed for the Fountain Alley parking lot.

**Andy's and Carlisle project on the move:** Andy's Pet Shop has vacated its Notre Dame Avenue location to make way for Acquity Realty's Carlisle housing and office project. Owners **Lissa Shoun** and **Eric Bong** are looking for a more permanent location, but has temporarily moved to 429 S. Bascom.

For the time being, Andy's is selling hay, feeder insects, frozen snake food and bird foods. Andy's has emerged as a premier rescue pet adoption center in recent years, but that community service and boarding services are closed for now. Andy's, which had been downtown for 12 years after relocating from Race Street and The Alameda, has been in business in San Jose for 71 years.

Acquity expects to start construction of the Carlisle in the next six months at 51 Notre Dame Ave. The structure will be 21 stories tall. The Carlisle's plans include 12 floors of residential, five floors office and four floors of parking, plus ground-floor space for retail or restaurant. In total, it will be 290 housing units and 158,000 square feet of office.



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## Downtown Events

With the changes in protocols throughout California on June 15, SJDA and other event organizations downtown announced public events for 2021:

### Dine Downtown

Dine Downtown San Jose Restaurant "Week" returns for 18 days, starting July 1.

Normally the "week" lasts 10 days, but Dine Downtown was delayed and extended successfully to six weeks last October and November amid the COVID pandemic, so it will be extended again this year to assist with economic recovery after 15 months of tough times.

By deadline, 26 downtown eateries had confirmed participation offering food-and-drink pairings, 3- and 4-course price-fixed menus, or chef specials.

For first-timers as well as veteran downtown diners, the restaurant promotion provides a good way to explore new places and return to old favorites. Several new Dine Downtown restaurants that opened during the pandemic are participating: The Good Spot, Petiscos, Scott's Chowder House and The Shop by Chef Baca. 71 Saint Peter and Mezcal have been in the program all 13 years. All the choices are posted at [dinedowntownsj.com](http://dinedowntownsj.com).

### Music in the Park Aug. 27

Music in the Park, a concert series featuring nationally known talent that San Jose Downtown Association first began producing in 1989, will make its comeback in 2021.

"Our audience really missed getting together for Music in the Park during the pandemic," said **Donna Butcher**, events and promotions manager for San Jose Downtown Association. "We're excited to bring it back."

As of June 25, the band has not yet been announced. Instead of a typical year featuring multiple shows, one concert is scheduled this summer — Aug. 27, 5:30-9 p.m. at Plaza de Cesar Chavez. [musicintheparksj.com](http://musicintheparksj.com).

### Starlight Cinemas

Starlight Cinemas returns to St. James Park this summer for four nights of movie-watching on the grass and under the stars. The movies are free:

- July 21 — Up! (PG)
- July 28 — The Perfect Game (PG)
- Aug. 4 — Raya and the Dragon (PG)
- Aug. 11 — The Karate Kid (PG)

SJDA works with the City of San Jose Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services to produce Starlight Cinemas. As in the past, activities precede the screening, and a food truck is available. Films begin at dusk. More details are at [sjdowntown.com/starlight](http://sjdowntown.com/starlight).

### CityDance

CityDance is back with free nights of dancing coinciding with the San Jose Museum of Art's First Fridays program Aug. 6, Sept. 3 and Oct. 1.

All three events in the Circle of Palm will focus on genres of Latin music. Guests will participate in an hour of instructor-led dance lessons followed by live dance music. "Grab a bite to eat and a drink at the Museum's Cafecito by Mezcal, check out the new exhibits at the museum, and dance the night away," said **Nely Torres**, senior events manager for the city's Office of Cultural Affairs.

## Downtown News

**Wheeler fits in at Groundwerx:** James Wheeler prefers jobs where he gets to work primarily outdoors.

"I love that I get to exercise while working," said Wheeler, Groundwerx Employee of the Month for June.

For four years he worked as an associate technician and glazier, where he was responsible for cutting, installing and removing glass panels on buildings. He also had experience working for a company assigned to help clean freeway shoulders.

That experience was valuable when he applied for a position in March 2021 as a pan-and-broom operator for Groundwerx after seeing an ad on job-search site Indeed.

Now, he not only works outside on downtown streets, he also enjoys talking with business owners, residents

and visitors.

"When I started here, everything was closed due to the pandemic," he said. "Now most restaurants are open and more people are on the streets."

"Some people I meet are still down on their luck, but most people are happy," he added. "I like when they ask for directions or thank me for my work. Some even offer tips, but of course we can't accept them."

Born and raised in San Jose, Wheeler enjoys a plate of pasta now and then from the Old Spaghetti Factory.

His cleaning statistics the past month included: removing 24 cases of graffiti; attending to 514 pan-and-broom block faces; and cleaning 1,064 public trash cans. Also, as part of a supplemental service in St. James Park in collaboration with the San Jose Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services Department, he removed graffiti eight times; picked up 21 bags of litter, debris and leaves; emptied 226 public trash cans; and cleaned 100 pieces of public furniture.

## From the Archives

**10 years ago — July 2011** — Mayor **Chuck Reed** and Councilmember **Sam Liccardo** hosted a fundraiser for Downtown Ice and Christmas in the Park. Silicon Valley Leadership Group, which eventually created the Santa Run to raise money for the two events, estimated downtown businesses gained more than \$15 million each



James Wheeler

year from skaters and holiday revelers because of these events.

**15 years ago — July 2006** — For the second annual San Jose Grand Prix, race organizers worked with city staff to institute tactics that could help "spread the wealth" among downtown businesses, including adding new entrances and exits, distributing marketing collateral to race-goers and encouraging that attendees park downtown. SJDA also created a "Discover Downtown" card full of special offers.

**20 years ago — July 2001** — Colorful neon circles, squares and rectangles were added to the exterior of The Rep Theatre (now Hammer Center).

**25 years ago — July 1996** — SJDA commemorated its 10th year with a special anniversary logo that used the slogan, "Ten years. One goal. Infinite possibilities."

**30 years ago — July 1991** — SJDA held its second four-day America Festival at Discovery Meadow park, starting with fireworks and a **Drifters** concert July 4, two shows by **Pablo Sanchez** on July 5 and Tapestry in Talent July 6-7.

## DOWNTOWN DIMENSION

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