

First 100 days SJDA's CEO puts fresh lens on downtown

Three months into his job as CEO of the San Jose Downtown Association, **Alex Stettinski's** enthusiasm for downtown grows by the day.

"The thing I am most excited about is the number of truly passionate, committed people I have met who want to collaborate with us on creating a better downtown," he said. "I am honored to be part of a team of new leaders — a new mayor, new council representatives — looking at our problems with fresh eyes and sincere desire to fix the things that need fixing and enhancing that which is working well in our downtown."

Mayor **Matt Mahan** recently appointed Stettinski to sit on the transition team focused on Downtown Vibrancy, to be headed by new District 3 Councilmember **Omar Torres**, who most recently worked at SJDA.

"I think I will bring a good perspective to that group on what is happening in other downtowns around the country," Stettinski said.

It has taken some work to get his arms around the inner-workings of a "rather complicated" organization, he said.

"SJDA has a lot of moving parts and complex partnerships within its separate organizations: the Downtown Association, the PBID and the Downtown Foundation."

He spent his first two months gaining an understanding of internal work flow and an intricate budget, but is now working with a consultant and the staff leadership team on transitioning the internal mindset to be more strategic and focused on metrics.

"It's important to measure the results of our work and our initiatives," he said.

Externally, he has attended daily meetings with stakeholders, including elected officials, business



SJDA CEO Alex Stettinski

owners and managers, developers, and community leaders.

"There are so many people here who are passionate about downtown and want to help take it to the next level."

"I honestly hear a lot of enthusiasm and passion when I am talking to people who live and work downtown, and often hear negative remarks from people who tell me they never come here because they have some misconceived notion that downtown is dead or that downtown is unsafe. When I hear that from people, I always ask, 'have you been downtown lately?'"

"Downtown San Jose is going through a huge transition now," Stettinski explained. "We're not alone in this, as downtowns across the country are shape-shifting from being mostly made up of businesses that service the daytime population of office workers to businesses that support a diverse and growing residential population."

As a downtown resident himself, Stettinski can attest to the fact that downtown really comes to life at night.

At Miro, the new tower across Santa Clara Street from City Hall, Stettinski continues his love for high-rise living. In his previous job leading Reno's equivalent to our downtown association, he also chose to live in a high-rise overlooking downtown.

"I spend a lot of time meditating and looking out my windows," he said. "I can see all the way to the mountains, and it's thrilling."

Besides enjoying his view, Stettinski likes walking his dog **Spencer** through the Sonic Runway art installation at City Hall, working out at WestCA or the Miro gym, going to coffee shops, and eating at restaurants. A few early favorites are Petisco's, Scott's Seafood, and Tostada's on Santa Clara, but he still has a lot more eateries to try, he said.

His greatest disappointment since moving to San Jose is the condition of St. James Park, which he can see from his apartment.

"It looks so beautiful from up there, and I was excited to have a great park just a short walk from my home," he said. "I would really like to see our city leaders take a look at how they can better manage the activities in that park, as it could be such an amazing community asset."

After 100 days on the job, he sees the opportunity to put a spotlight on St. James Park and the Guadalupe River Park as two areas that could become important attractions for residents and visitors alike.

When asked what he hopes people will say about him at his retirement dinner years from now, Stettinski took his time before answering: "I want to be remembered as a great collaborator who helped to create the vibrant downtown we will be enjoying by then."

Changes for newsletter

Downtown Dimension, the longtime monthly newsletter of the San Jose Downtown Association, will transition to an all-digital format this spring.

Dimension will be emailed to business members and subscribers whenever important news and announcements need to be shared. This is the next-to-last printed version — the March edition will be the final printed version.

"It's time that *Downtown Dimension* cater to the way most people want to receive their news these days," said **Rick Jensen**, SJDA communications director. "News about downtown will be offered in short bites, with the gist of the message at the top. If they want more of the story, they can click to an expanded version posted on sjdowntown.com."

Print-only subscribers can click on the **E-News** button at the top or the **Subscribe** button at the bottom of most pages of sjdowntown.com to continue receiving *Downtown Dimension*.

For more than a decade, SJDA has offered print and online versions of *Downtown Dimension*, a total of about 5,000 subscribers, of which more than 3,000 receive it through an email that links them to that month's newsletter. The online option was created when business members said they preferred a more timely digital version.

Most readers want the information today without waiting for the start of a new month. Look for regular editions of the online *Downtown Dimension* beginning in mid-March. Information shared in *The Weekly Message to Businesses* — which debuted the week after COVID shelter-in-place orders were issued — will fold into the *Dimension*.

The upgraded e-version will include a combination of news that impacts businesses and downtown; features about the people who add to downtown's economy and vibrancy; updates about seminars, workshops and loan and grant opportunities for businesses; and links to downtown San Jose coverage by other media outlets. SJDA will also celebrate new openings and business anniversaries and will retain the "From the Archives" feature.

Dimension has been printed for 35 years, starting as a quarterly publication for members in 1987 and transitioning into a monthly in 1995. The design has been updated, but the format has remained largely unchanged.

The change is backed by national and local metrics that suggest people open and close email messages in 10-15 seconds. Both the *Downtown Dimension* and the *Weekly Message to Businesses* far exceeds industry open-rate averages and the time spent on SJDA emails. However, statistics reveal that most users are satisfied with the summaries and don't click for a deeper dive as often.

"We think our subscribers will appreciate the summaries and timely presentation," said **Nanci Williams**, SJDA brand manager, who did the analysis.

Questions, feedback or to subscribe?
Message rjensen@sjdowntown.com.

Q&A: D3 Councilmember Omar Torres

Omar Torres, lifelong San Jose resident and longtime community advocate, started serving as downtown's councilmember in January.

Torres grew up in the Guadalupe-Washington neighborhood south of downtown, the son and grandson of Del Monte cannery workers who instilled working-class values around education, community and hard work. He previously served on two school boards, worked at City Hall and most recently served as business resiliency manager for San Jose Downtown Association.

He will serve as City Council liaison on the new Downtown Vibrancy transition team, and responded to questions for *Downtown Dimension* on more challenges he plans to take on the next four years:

What are your primary objectives for your first term as Councilmember?

My goal has always been to revitalize the downtown area to make it an attractive place for businesses to flourish as our

job base and population grows. At the same time, support existing local businesses that create the backbone of our city's identity.

I will work with all stakeholders to foster economic development opportunities throughout District 3, and focus on filling our vacant stores in Luna Park, Calle Willow, Japantown, East Santa Clara Street, and downtown — the core of San Jose. Economic recovery for the core of San Jose is critical.

Investing in our arts organizations is a must to improve our downtown. If our art scene is not thriving, then downtown isn't either. Making significant investments in our arts and culture is my top priority.

Also, addressing public safety and quality-of-life issues leads to a vibrant city. Men, women, single mothers, families and our kiddos deserve to walk on safe streets without the concern of abandoned vehicles or seeing illegal dumping.



Continued on Back Page

D3 Councilmember Omar Torres

