

For immediate release

March 14, 2022

Search begins for San Jose Downtown Association CEO

SAN JOSE – A nationwide search is underway to find the next leader of San Jose Downtown Association (SJDA) as its founding CEO Scott Knies leaves the business 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, in 1986, saw a need for an organization to protect their interests as streets and sidewalks were being torn up for light rail and other 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 the SJDA newsletter, [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 iconic and 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 Parks](#) 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 an 11-point design criteria, and provide expert feedback to the developers and planners. The very best projects are bestowed with the 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 St., 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 <https://sjdowntown.com/careers>. Applications are due April 22, 2022.

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