

# SJDA vision: 'More of everything'

Downtown San Jose should be dense, bustling and vibrant.

This vision is achieved by downtown being a home for a wide variety of businesses; a transportation hub; a fantastic arts, dining, entertainment and nightlife destination; and having more housing for all levels of income, according to SJDA's policy document, released Feb. 20.

Developing a vision for downtown is one of SJDA's strategic priorities. The organization worked with members, city staff, community stakeholders and Gensler designers to describe downtown's future. SJDA's vision document is posted at SJDA News on sjdowntown.com.

"Most of all, our vision for downtown San Jose is that we need more of everything," said **Michelle Azevedo**, SJDA director of policy and operations. "The policies and practices we set in motion now, with strong leadership from the City government and business community, will help us grow to assume our place as America's safest, most technologically advanced, and best-connected big city."

Azevedo and Business Development Manager **Nate LeBlanc** outlined how the vision can be achieved in a presentation at SJDA's February public meeting.

"We have lost track of the meaning of 'vibrant,'" LeBlanc said. "Vibrant to me is the feeling I get on an event day — when people are carrying their chairs to the jazz festival, when people are preparing for South First Fridays or on Friday when we get a glimpse of people spilling out

of their offices to go to the Farmer's Market. For our vision of vibrant to succeed, we need for the streets of San Jose to be filled more often than between 11:45 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. on a Friday."

In SJDA's vision, downtown is the destination, not merely a pass-through. Bustle and vibrancy are caused by people going to and from their homes, jobs, the central train station, enjoying a redesigned St. James Park, restaurants and businesses, the public spaces in the paseo, San Pedro Square, museums, theaters and sports.

One bold idea is to move light-rail outside the downtown core for area wide travel, with a main connection at the San Jose Central Station, a.k.a. Diridon.

"Given the opportunity we currently have to reimagine San Jose, additional thought should be given to the future of light rail, particularly in downtown," Azevedo said. "Why not consider altogether bypassing downtown with the exception of a single downtown light rail stop at Diridon Station, where riders could then connect to Caltrain and BART? Such a decision would then free up sections of First and Second streets, which could become more pedestrian and bike friendly, resulting in increased commerce and vibrancy."

To create a dynamic employment center, the SJDA document calls for incentives for commercial development, flexible zoning and active marketing of the city. Additionally, there should be more resources

and connections for small businesses and start-ups as well a safer pedestrian environment with wider sidewalks and more bike lanes.

On the housing front, SJDA's vision calls for more housing for all income levels using incentives and leveraging public lands. More permanent supportive housing for homeless is critical, the document said.

"There are a few major things we need to get right: BART, Google, Diridon, the developments by Urban Community and Jay Paul among them, and then a million little things," LeBlanc said. "Residents will demand richer arts and culture establishments, as well as highly acclaimed restaurants. Having clean, safe, well-lit public areas and connectivity between districts. More 'things to do' for all age ranges. More entertainment venues. More and different retail concepts and active uses, especially on the Santa Clara Street Corridor."

Response to the plan at the meeting was positive. During a discussion between Councilmember **Raul Peralez** and SJDA Executive Director **Scott Knies**, Peralez referenced elements of the vision, agreeing with the need for more affordable housing, more permanent supportive housing for homeless and safety tactics.

"We want to get back to being the safest city in America," Peralez said. "Not just because it sounds good, but because we remember what that felt like and want to feel it again."

## ICA turns 40 / Cathy Kimball to retire in June

*Do you remember back in 2009 when ICA filled the gallery with **Lewis deSoto's** work, including a room resembling a Buddhist garden full of cocoa chips. You could smell the chocolate. It was a totally immersive, tactile experience. People still talk about it.*

*How about 2010 when they invited **Steve Martin** ... yes, actor-author-comedian Steve Martin ... to attend ICA's annual auction, giving it a "snowball's chance in hell" that he might show. Martin did respond, however, sending back a mixed media performance piece encased in a Chinese takeout container. It was placed on a silver platter, carried down the aisle by a woman wearing black and escorted by two guards with sunglasses and ear pieces. They opened the container the night of the auction and inside was a white Styrofoam ball surrounded by orange flames!*

*Martin thought it would get a few hundred bucks — it raised \$3,000. That's ICA.*

San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) has had people talking art for 40 years.

"Contemporary art is generally thought of as art made in the last 10 years," said **Cathy Kimball**, who has been executive director and chief curator for the non-profit since 2000. "It's not so much cutting edge, rather, art in the present tense."

Since its first exhibition in October 1980, ICA has stayed in the moment, trying to stage exhibitions relevant with the times, making art accessible to everyone and appealing to San Jose's tastes. Not so simple.

"It was an up-and-down existence when I arrived here," said Kimball, who's previous job was curator at the San Jose Museum of Art. "We could maybe look out one or two shows. Now, we're booked out for a couple of years. It helps that we know what's next, for funding and



Cathy Kimball has led SJICA for 20 years. Photo courtesy SJICA

marketing purposes."

Most of the artists showing their work in the early days were local. As time went on, ICA began showing regional artists from Marin County, Carmel and Los Angeles, then national and now artists of international acclaim. ICA takes pride in helping launch the careers of budding contemporary artists — **Tracey Snelling**, **Binh Danh** and **Val Britton** to name a few with shows this past decade.

As ICA's geographic identity has grown, so has its reputation.

"Cathy is an incredible leader," said **Kerry Adams Hapner**, San Jose Cultural Affairs Director. "She has art world cred and community respect. She is involved, engaged, ambitious and always striving."

Adds **Michael Ogilvie**, San Jose's Public Art Director: "Her

commitment to quality programming as well as her intelligence, and good-humored nature play a role in ICA's success."

Kimball's sense of humor is on full display on the sjica.org website, where part of her biography reads: "Her favorite part of the job is when everyone pretends to listen to her."

Speaking of "everyone," Kimball has built her staff to six full-timers over the years, a point of pride. She recalls days when the organization leased space on South First Street with only one toilet, no heat or air conditioning — and when the security system was a cow bell hanging from the front door.

"You can't ask to borrow art from museums and other public collections when you don't have an HVAC system," she said.

The most joyful moment of her professional life was in April 2006 when ICA was able to purchase their current building — a 7,500-square-foot space at 560 S. First St. — using \$750,000 from an anonymous donor and a \$500,000 forgivable loan from the Redevelopment Agency. Kimball raised another \$2.5 million to renovate the building and add furniture, fixtures and equipment.

"Given California's real estate climate, it is more important than ever for arts organizations to own their building," said The Museum of Quilts and Textiles' **Nancy Bavor**, who noted her museum in SoFA had 11 previous homes. ICA, the quilt museum, San Jose Stage and MACLA were all able to acquire their buildings in the 2000s.

Fiscal prudence has also helped ICA's annual budget increase steadily. Besides the annual auction, where a single item may sell for up to \$25,000, ICA has diverse financial backing by individuals, government, corporations and foundations including the Packard Foundation, Applied Materials Foundation, the Knight Foundation, California Arts Council, National Endowment for the Arts and the City of San Jose.

"A key to longevity is the ability to be adaptive to change, which ICA exemplifies," Adams Hapner said.

ICA continued on Back Page



Lewis de Soto's cocoa-chip garden, above, and Steve Martin's snowball in hell. Photos by David Pace.



## ICA

Continued from Front Page

"Forty years is a good run for any arts group," Kimball said. "And it's not just us. Quilts. MACLA. There's no end in sight. Even with all the economic challenges we face."

SoFA contributes to ICA's vibrancy, and vice versa, Kimball said. "It works both ways. We all have unique offerings." SoFA galleries are seeing more daytime visitors each year, she noted.

And at night, loyal followers show up for First Fridays, Second Thursday Art After Dark, and opening receptions in record numbers.

Another key to ICA's success has been its bold and strategic programming, such as the popular Talking Art series with a focus on professional development for artists.

"We tell our artists that we want a 'Room Awesome' exhibition," Kimball said. "We got that term from a woman who came for a First Friday, which was packed. She was looking at an immersive installation that filled the Focus Gallery. When she entered the gallery, she exclaimed to the person she was speaking with on the phone: 'Oh my God, I just entered Room Awesome.' These immersive installations, which Kimball has named Sandbox Projects, have come to establish the ICA as a destination for this kind of unique art experience.

As always, ICA is looking to the future. A 40th Anniversary party is planned for June 20. As it turns out, the party will also be Kimball's ICA swansong. She announced her retirement on Valentine's Day.

For the 40th show, ICA will feature three artists from outside of the area from April 4-Aug 16:

- ◆ **Soo Sunny Park**, on the faculty at Dartmouth, explores light as sculptural material;
- ◆ **David Ellingsen** of Vancouver artistically explores weather patterns;
- ◆ **Jing Jing Lin** of Beijing and New York will have a video projection installation You Can Trust Me: A New Dawn For America and features an AI presidential candidate. Kimball promises to have a Room Awesome for the big event.

## Downtown News

### Downtown West Project gains leadership moniker:

Google's proposed Downtown West mixed-use project has received Gov. **Gavin Newsom's** approval to be an Environmental Leadership Development Project (ELDP). The project will utilize innovative measures to reduce traffic, air quality and other environmental impacts. The result of having ELDP designation is streamlined processes for gaining environmental approval.

To qualify for ELDP designation, the project has to meet a number of criteria, such as:

- ◆ The project would replace old and outmoded facilities with new job-creating facilities;
- ◆ The project creates several thousand jobs during

construction and thousands of jobs after construction;

- ◆ The project is privately funded and not funded by taxpayers;

Other projects with such designation include sports facilities in San Francisco, Oakland, San Diego and Inglewood, Apple Campus 2, and other statewide projects costing more than \$100 million each.

**Guadalupe River Park on new path:** The Knight Foundation announced Jan. 22 three years of funding totaling \$600,000 for San Francisco Bay Area Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR) and Guadalupe River Park Conservancy to work together to reimagine the 254-acre park and transform it into a destination for the citizens of San Jose.

**Second life for 110-year-old apartments:** The Pallesen Apartments built in Mission Revival-style in 1910 will be moved from its original location on Reed Street between First and Second streets to an empty quarter-acre lot on the southeast corner of Fourth and Reed streets next to the Interstate 280 on-ramp.

The new location for the two-story building of four units is owned by the City of San Jose, which will sell the lot for one dollar to Habitat for Humanity East Bay / Silicon Valley. Preservation Action Council is donating \$10,000 for building renovation after the move. The units will be sold as affordable housing.

Donating the building and paying the freight is KT Urban, which plans the 27-story Garden Gate tower on the space occupied by the apartments, a parking lot and Garden City Construction offices. Garden City is relocating its offices along Monterey Highway in the SoDA District.

SJDA's Facebook page first told of KT Urban's desire to save the building by relocating it. The *Mercury News* and KGO-TV Channel 7 picked up the story. Credit Councilmember **Raul Peralez**, who brought all parties together to arrange the deal.

**Two hotels approved by City Council:** Two hotels planned for downtown were approved by the City Council, but not before receiving push-back from preservationists during late-January meetings.

KT Urban received Council approval on Jan. 14 to build a 272-room Almaden Corner Hotel of 19 stories on an 8,500-square-foot site at 8 N. Almaden Blvd. adjacent to Hotel De Anza and the Axis condominiums. No parking is planned for the hotel, which would have a long-term agreement with the city to use 41 spaces in the Market-San Pedro Square Garage for valet services.

The Hotel De Anza has filed a lawsuit, arguing the Almaden Corner high-rise hotel would lead to the demise of the older hotel. The suit claims the City did not adequately consider the environmental impacts of the proposed hotel and asks for a reversal of the Council's decision.

Prior to the lawsuit filing, neighbors and businesses of the Almaden Corner hotel complained about the parking situation, traffic congestion generated by the hotel and its design, especially its height looming over the Hotel De Anza. Nonetheless, the City Council unanimously approved the project, citing developer efforts to make the roof more compatible with the De Anza, and a need to make the downtown more people-friendly than auto-friendly.

Khana Enterprises got the go-ahead Jan. 28 to add a 24-story hotel tower of 274 rooms cantilevered over the historic Montgomery Hotel, now serving the public as Four Points by Sheraton San Jose hotel at 211 S. First St. The original 1911 building is four floors and 86 rooms and will connect to the new addition via a glass atrium.

Representing the owners of the Montgomery property, **Erik Schoennauer** applauded the approval for more rooms to support growing convention, business and visitor activity downtown. But preservationists questioned the need to build on top of a historic building.

**San Jose State housing on the paseo:** San Jose State University announced plans to tear down the State of California Alquist building on Paseo San Antonio and replace it with high-rise buildings of 800 to 1,200 apartments for faculty, staff, graduate students and students with families. The living spaces would be rented at below-market value, allowing more integration of the university into the community. The proposed project will also include parking, offices and some retail on the paseo. It won't be completed for at least five years.

### Urban Catalyst proposes new student tower:

Urban Catalyst purchased an aging 15-unit apartment complex at 475 S. Fourth St. and announced plans to build a high-rise apartment building of at least 220 multi-family apartments and four-bedroom suites –

## Downtown Facts

### SJC Passengers

Year	Passengers	vs. Previous year
2019	17.7 million	9.3%
2018	14.3 million	14.7%
2017	12.5 million	15.6%
2016	10.8 million	10.2%
2015	9.8 million	4.4 %
2014	9.4 million	6.9 %
2012-13	8.5 million	2.9%
2011-12	8.26 million	
2001-02	13.9 million	(Previous record)

Source: Mineta San Jose International Airport (SJC)

## From the Archives

**10 years ago – March 2010** – The City Council gave the Rotary Club the green light to negotiate a contract to build a "play garden" in Guadalupe River Park and Gardens.

**15 years ago – March 2005** – Work started on a \$6 million "exhibit-hall-style, frame-and-fabric tensile structure" of 80,000 square feet to be known as the South Hall of the Convention Center.

**20 years ago – March 2000** – Downtown's overall office vacancy rate reached an all-time low of 2.5 percent. At the time, 62 buildings totaling 6.2 million square feet were analyzed. Some rents topped \$4 per square foot.



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**25 years ago – March 1995** – VTA listened to businesses and opted for low-floor light-rail vehicles instead of high platforms to make downtown boarding ADA-compliant. SJDA members said that platforms 6-feet-high would hinder retail recruiting efforts along the Transit Mall. With the low-rise vehicles, all passengers, including those in wheelchairs, would board trains directly from the platform.

**30 years ago – March 1990** – SJDA's first shopping survey revealed that people living within three miles of downtown came downtown to eat (40%), shop (26%), attend special events (25%) and for business activity (22%).

## At the Convention Center

March 3 – **Paul Nicklen:** San Jose Speaker Series (2,850) sanjosetheaters.org

March 10-12 – SaaStr 2020 (7,100) saastrannual.com/agenda

March 11-12 – SCVSEFA Synopsis Championship (3,200) science-fair.org

March 15-18 – Strata Data (5,000) conferences.oreilly.com/strata-data-ai/stai-ca

March 18-19 – Brands Biz Con (5,000) brandsbizcon.com

March 22-26 – NVIDIA GPU Tech Conference (6,658) nvidia.com/en-us/gtc

March 29 – Public Dance (15,000) (estimated attendance)

enough for 800 beds. For now, the project retains the nickname of the current units, The Mark. Urban Catalyst now has seven properties in and around downtown, paying \$6.25 million for its latest acquisition.

## Business News

**New Ballet:** New Ballet spent Leap Day moving its operations into the Corinthian Ballroom at 196 N. Third St. Their new location features five newly constructed dance studios, dressing rooms and two student lounges. New Ballet is a non-profit led by **Dalia Rawson** founded on Feb. 29, 2016. Check newballet.com.



LvL Up has a game-board mural by David Canavese.

**No tilting:** LvL Up will open its second South Bay arcade in SoFA District, scheduled to debut in March at 408 S. Second St. in the former BoTown restaurant.

The gastropub features uncommon food choices such as turkey meatballs, garlic and herb naan, tomato and garlic steamed clams, prawn cocktails and Cordon Bleu chicken bites. Check thelvup.com.

**Worldly cheeses:** Owner **Liana Ryan** has opened

Divine Cheese at 27 Devine St. #30, where she sells more than 40 domestic and international artisan cheeses, a collection of old- and new-world wines and serves dinner. Open 5-10 p.m. Check devinecheeseandwine.com.

## March Event

**Quiet on the set ... Action!** Cinequest Film & Creativity Festival celebrates its 30th anniversary March 3-15 at theaters and night spots throughout downtown San Jose. Cinequest will honor **Jesse Eisenberg** as a Maverick Spirit. Eisenberg was part of the ensemble cast of "Zombieland" and hit it big playing **Mark Zuckerberg** in "The Social Network." He stars as **Marcel Marceau**, WWII hero, in the closing night feature "Resistance." Before it's over, 321 films will be shown. Check cinequest.org.

## SJDA Meeting

**April 10:** SJDA's next public meeting April 10 will focus on behavioral and mental health homelessness mitigations. Meet at the San Jose Museum of Art Wendell Room, starting 8 a.m. Reserve a seat at sjdsvp@sjdowntown.com.

## DOWNTOWN DIMENSION

Downtown Dimension is published monthly by the San Jose Downtown Association, a nonprofit organization established in 1986 to serve Downtown businesses.

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