

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 30, 2022

From Blight to Vibrancy:

Sobrato Philanthropies supports the School of Arts and Culture's La Avenida project.

The School of Arts and Culture at the Mexican Heritage Plaza is grateful to announce a \$2 million program related investment (PRI) from Sobrato Philanthropies for La Avenida.

For over ten years, the School of Arts and Culture (SOAC) at the Mexican Heritage Plaza (La Plaza) has served as a cultural hub for East San José, hosting community events and educational programs that promote local artists and arts organizations. And, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, La Plaza served over 150,000 residents, leading an 18-month emergency response that reached every corner of their community via food distribution, testing, and vaccination.

As the community enters recovery, SOAC's bold solution to meet the ongoing needs of their neighborhood and the increased displacement of residents is La Avenida. La Avenida is a multi-phased project designed to revitalize the Alum Rock Avenue Corridor located in the Mayfair neighborhood of East San José. Sobrato's investment in the first phase of this wide-reaching vision allows SOAC to acquire the 28,000 square-foot vacant commercial property across the street from the Mexican Heritage Plaza. This space will expand cultural programming and bring needed family wellness services, which will be provided by SOAC's equity partner Gardner Health Services. The development of this space is the first step to future development that includes affordable housing and commercial space for local businesses and community-based providers on La Plaza's six acres.

Why now?

East San José is a working-class neighborhood of immigrants — nearly half of East San José's population is foreign born. Of those, half are from Latin America and half from Asia. The area is historically underserved and largely overlooked when investments are made in safety net services, education, and healthcare. Yet, the immigrants who have made East San José home for generations have created an area rich in cultural distinctiveness that speaks to their diverse origins, such as Portuguese, Vietnamese, and Mexican.

Ironically, East San José, as a vulnerable undervalued neighborhood, is ground zero for outside developers initiating commercial and residential projects that do not consider or serve the long-time residents and creators of the neighborhood. Instead, the area's working artists and families are forced to move out when they can no longer afford the rising rents. The result is the loss of the neighborhood's unique and diverse cultural identity, as well as those people who have called East San José home for generations.

This investment by Sobrato Philanthropies gives La Plaza -- a place-based cultural institution, led by women of color -- the ability to leverage capital to ensure community assets remain in the Mayfair community. Every dollar invested into La Avenida is a return on, and a reinforcement of, the well-being of residents' livelihood and the commitment to community-first. Sobrato's generous endorsement gets SOAC closer to achieving their goals.

Maggie Hobstetter:

"Sobrato Philanthropies is thrilled to provide bridge funding for the School of Arts and Culture's acquisition of 1785 Alum Rock Avenue. The development will be catalytic for expansion of SOAC's model, and for the launch of new family and youth mental health services in East San Jose," shared Maggie Hobstetter, Program Director of Economic Mobility at Sobrato Philanthropies. "This investment in an East San Jose community-based and BIPOC-led organization is a strong example of Sobrato Philanthropies' vision for Silicon Valley impact through social purpose real estate, community development, and investing in anchor community institutions combating displacement and shifting power through real-estate ownership."

Jessica Paz-Cedillos and Vanessa Shieh:

"We are grateful for the support of Sobrato Philanthropies. Their program related investment gives SOAC the ability to leverage capital to ensure development without displacement can take place in this neighborhood. With their investment, we will redevelop a mostly vacant block of stores into a thriving hub that will bring vibrancy to the community, provide jobs, and a place for cultural activities. This is the type of investment that can transform neighborhoods!"

About the School of Arts and Culture at Mexican Heritage Plaza

The School of Arts and Culture at the Mexican Heritage Plaza is a vibrant, cultural institution in East San José. Founded in 2011, La Plaza activates a vital local asset – the Mexican Heritage Plaza, a 6-acre, city-owned facility with an expansive plaza and theatre. Annually, La Plaza hosts over 150,000 people through its core programming. Its mission is to catalyze creativity and empower community. They do this by uplifting East San José's rich diversity through authentic placekeeping and relevant multicultural productions.

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