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CAST embraces SOAC's growing development in East San José, La Avenida

The School of Arts and Culture at Mexican Heritage Plaza (SOAC) is thrilled to announce their partnership with Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST) and their investment expansion into the South Bay.

The partnership with CAST supports SOAC's bold solution, La Avenida, to meet the ongoing needs of the neighborhood and the increased displacement of residents. La Avenida is a multi-phased project designed to revitalize the Alum Rock Avenue Corridor located in the Mayfair region of East San José. The initial phase is the acquisition of the 28,000 square-foot vacant commercial property across the street from the Mexican Heritage Plaza (La Plaza). The expansion will increase cultural programming and bring needed family wellness services which will be provided by SOAC's equity partner Gardner Health Services. Future development includes affordable housing on the King parking lot and commercial space for local businesses and community-based providers on La Plaza's six acres.

Co-Executive Director, Vanessa Shieh shares the significance of CAST's investment to East San José. "We are grateful for the support of CAST. Their program-related investment allows SOAC to leverage capital to ensure development without displacement can occur in East San José. 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 provide a place for cultural activities. This is the type of investment that can transform neighborhoods!"

Supported by the Kenneth Rainin Foundation, CAST's \$1 million dollar investment and partnership with SOAC brings CAST's portfolio to just over 80,000 square feet across 6 buildings in San Francisco, Oakland, and now San José, with another 120,000 square feet in the pipeline. CAST CEO, Moy Eng reaffirms their recent investment. "Our decision to invest in SOAC and expand to San José was an easy one because of SOAC's deep and sustained work in arts education and community building and the strength of our partners on the ground."

CAST is a community-centered real estate organization that works in deep partnership with local communities to secure and steward affordable space for artists and cultural workers in the San Francisco Bay Area. As an equity partner, advisor, and asset manager, CAST will provide knowledge, perspective, and the benefits of being part of a larger portfolio to guide the acquisition of the vacant commercial property across the street. Working in deep partnership with communities, CAST specializes in helping arts organizations build pathways to ownership, enabling artists to secure long-term affordable leases, and creating dedicated spaces for cultural connection and exchange. With SOAC, CAST will apply its now proven model—San Francisco arts group CounterPulse purchased their home from CAST this month—where CAST supports the acquisition of a property and partners with an arts organization to stabilize their real estate costs in an escalating market over 7-10 years, building the capacity of cultural organizations to lease or own property in the long-term. The current state of the real estate market in San José is concerning. In recent years, real estate prices have skyrocketed, and with the economic impact of COVID-19, many artists are at risk for displacement. The threat of financial insecurity and eviction is an alarming reality for many

BIPOC artists and entrepreneurs; through the collaborative partnership, SOAC can generate and support viable rent for arts and cultural activation. In line with the recent acquisition, SOAC continues to lay the foundation of La Avenida cultural district by leveraging the Local Purchasing Preference Policy to take precedence on external applications for housing priority, small business spaces, and artist activation to establish local economic growth.

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.

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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About Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST)

Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST) is a community-centered real estate organization committed to ensuring artists and cultural workers can stay anchored where they create. Founded in 2013, CAST works in deep partnership with communities across the San Francisco Bay Area, particularly communities that have endured systemic oppression and historical underinvestment. CAST models new ways to secure and steward affordable, inclusive spaces for creative and cultural expression by applying real estate financing tools and structural models in innovative ways, building community knowledge and agency, and creating and holding space for visioning and arts activation. Its programs and services have helped arts organizations like CounterPulse and Luggage Store Gallery in San Francisco build pathways to ownership, enabled artists to secure long-term affordable leases, and created dedicated spaces for cultural connection and exchange. Learn more at cast-sf.org

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About Kooltura Marketing

Based in San José, California, Kooltura Marketing specializes in multicultural marketing, helping clients reach audiences of a specific ethnicity, culture, and subculture through a grassroots approach strategy. They lead the marketing and outreach on behalf of the School of Arts and Culture at MHP.

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