

# NEWS

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**For Immediate Release**

## **Arts and Culture: Keys to Community Recovery Out of the Pandemic**

### *County launches Office of Arts and Culture*

**Redwood City** – It’s tempting for some to say that there exists no first-class arts and culture scene between San Francisco and Los Angeles. It’s not true, of course.

Here on the Peninsula alone, there’s [Zawaya](#) in San Mateo, which promotes and teaches Arabic arts, and [Quinteto Latino](#) in Menlo Park, which seeks to build community through Latino classical music. [Manuia Polynesian Revue](#) is a Daly City dance company dedicated to preserving the music and dances of the Polynesian islands.

Although none may have the cachet of a [de Young Museum](#) in Golden Gate Park or Getty Center [high above the 405](#), dozens of groups dedicated to the arts and culture dot a map of San Mateo County.

And Robin Rodricks, as the head of the new San Mateo County Office of Arts and Culture, seeks to connect those dots. She sees a thriving arts and culture scene as a powerful force to help the region emerge from the pandemic, both for the economic and emotional recovery.

“The arts are second responders,” Rodricks said. “As we come out of the social isolation from the COVID-19 restrictions on gathering, the arts can help the community heal and grow. We are very much a part of the recovery effort.”

But why invest County resources into what is sometimes seen as a private endeavor?

“San Mateo County believes that the arts are a value that improves the lives of our residents,” said San Mateo County Supervisor Carole Groom. “All forms of art, whether performing, visual, or literary, contributes to our cultural values and bookmarks our experiences. In opening this office, the County is providing a gathering place for local artists

and the art-interested to develop projects that will create beauty, communicate new ideas, and bring communities together. I am very excited about this!”

### **Born Amid the Pandemic**

In February 2020, the San Mateo County Arts Commission published its [strategic plan](#) that includes this statement:

*Our vision is that by 2030 San Mateo County is known and recognized as an arts-rich community with diverse and inclusive arts events, programs, and services accessible and equitable to all residents.*

With that, many looked forward to what the future would bring.

“A thriving arts and cultural scene is a fundamental element of healthy and thriving communities,” said Supervisor Dave Pine. “The arts enhance our lives, our economy, our civic assets and even give voice to our common triumphs and tragedies.”

Then, within weeks, COVID-19 exploded as a global health threat.

Just as [Hamilton: An American Musical](#) went dark in San Francisco, so did the local Hillbarn Theater, Dragon Productions Theater and Peninsula Ballet Theatre, along with galleries and other venues. Organizations also lost a season-plus of outdoor cultural festivals that bring together individuals and families of all backgrounds.

“What we witnessed was a vital part of our community shut down with no clear light at the end of the tunnel for them,” said County Manager Mike Callagy. “With no revenue stream, many of our local organizations faced permanent closure.”

In response, the [Board of Supervisors steered \\$150,000](#) in federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds as grants to help local nonprofit arts and cultural groups weather the storm. Total grants topped \$230,000 with additional donations from foundations and other sources.

“What we quickly learned is that we need a point person to actively find grant opportunities and a point person to work with our local arts and cultural organizations,” Callagy said.

“We can only lean on the volunteers who serve on the Art Commission for so much. In many ways, we modeled this new office on the Parks Commission and Veterans Commission,” Callagy said. “On those commissions, we have community members who serve in advisory roles. Then it’s our staff who carry out their and the Board’s vision. Robin is now in that role with the Office of Arts and Culture.”

Rodricks has worked as a volunteer for 10 years on the [San Mateo County Arts Commission](#) and worked for a decade as a manager for the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco.

The all-volunteer Arts Commission offers three galleries for local artists on the County Center campus in Redwood City. They also offer trainings and workshops for artists and, among other activities, hosts Poetry Out Loud, a national poetry competition for high school students.

As the Office of Arts and Culture executive director, Rodricks, who is hired on a contract, will work closely with the Arts Commission. Her role, along with a part-time assistance and a soon-to-be-hired curator, expands

Rodricks has the following goals laid out for her by County leaders:

- Staffing the Arts Commission and assisting commissioners in implementing its strategic plan.
- Applying for federal, state and private funding in support of County arts and artists.
- Managing state and federal grants.
- Promoting cross-departmental collaborations to achieve the County's goals of incorporating arts, culture and creativity into all sectors of County government.
- Liaising with key County partners to further the arts and culture countywide.

As for a splashier goal, she has her eyes on spring 2022, when with more COVID-19 vaccines in arms the state and nation may have turned the corner on the pandemic.

“Working together, I would like to see a countywide arts festival with something going on throughout the Peninsula,” she said. “The opportunities are out there and I think we can help make the connections to make it happen.”

When you start to connect the dots, you never know where the lines may lead.

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*All babies are born with a knowledge of poetry, because the lub-dub of the mother's heart is in iambic meter. Then, life slowly starts to choke the poetry out of us. – Poet Billy Collins*

