

STATE DESIGNATION SAN RAFAEL HONORED FOR ITS ART, CULTURAL FOCUS



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San Rafael economic development coordinator Tom Adams and ArtWorks Downtown executive director Elizabeth Setten walk through ArtWorks Downtown in San Rafael. The city was honored for its celebration of art and culture.

City praised for galleries, studios, events, activities

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Arts and culture in San Rafael just got a big boost this week with a new honor: California Cultural District.

The downtown area of the city — centered along Fourth Street — was one of 14 places statewide granted that designation in a new program that celebrates art and culture in the state.

"We're really excited about the designation," said Tom Adams, San Rafael's economic development coordinator. "We've been working on it for awhile."

Adams said although many businesses in the city exhibit great artwork and design in their windows and stores, the San Rafael Arts District has five "anchor partners."

Those are ArtWorks Downtown, with four galleries, 27 artist studios, 17 affordable housing units for artists, and various arts related businesses; the California Film Institute, an inter-

nationally known film organization that includes the Smith Rafael Film Center, exhibitor and education programs and the home of the Mill Valley Film Festival; Youth in Arts, a visual and performing arts training for children and a youth artists' gallery; Falkirk Cultural Center, a city-owned historic building and home to art exhibitions, lectures, and community events and the Downtown San Rafael Business Improvement District, sponsor of various arts related events and activities.

Elizabeth Setten, executive director of ArtWorks Downtown, said the designation reflects a community collaboration that's been going on for many years.

"Many people don't realize what we've been doing here," she said. "With this honor, it's all coming together under an umbrella that really helps us communicate to the Bay Area, to the county of Marin and the state of California what we are — a cultural and arts district."

The award, which lasts for five years, was competitive and



Max Thelen Studio resident artist Lara Myers chats with San Rafael economic development coordinator Tom Adams and ArtWorks Downtown executive director Elizabeth Setten.

attracted submissions from dozens of communities around the state.

Benefits from the designation for this pilot launch of the program include technical assistance, peer-to-peer exchanges, and branding materials and promotional strategy. The California Arts Council has partnered with Visit California and Caltrans for strategic statewide

marketing and resource support.

"This will help to share the information of who we are with so many people who may not know the richness of this community," Setten said.

San Rafael was described by the program judges as "authentic, inclusive and surprising," Setten said. That had to do with