

BY VICTOR SPANO

PUTTING VACANT STOREFRONTS TO USE

Making space for the arts benefits community

During 2010, Pacifica, California (population 39,000; Steve Rhodes, city manager), formed an economic development committee (EDC) consisting of the city manager, two councilmembers, and representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses. This committee addresses economic issues the city has faced over the past few years as a result of the Great Recession.

Numerous projects have been undertaken, including but not limited to branding, location maps, business retention and attraction, building and planning process improvement, organizing of merchants associations, and cooperation with such entities as the Small Business Administration.

One of the shopping centers in Pacifica, called Eureka Square, has suffered the most with a vacancy rate of more than 50 percent. An EDC member had visited a storefront art gallery during 2008 while visiting the city of Santa Rosa, California. The Santa Rosa Redevelopment Agency sponsored the Phantom Window Gallery project (<http://ci.santa-rosa.ca.us/departments/recreationandparks/programs/artsandculture/artsdistrict/Pages/PhantomGallery.aspx>) as a way to convert vacant storefronts into temporary art galleries. EDC's idea was to do something similar at Eureka Square or at any of the city's vacant spots.

Pivotal Progress

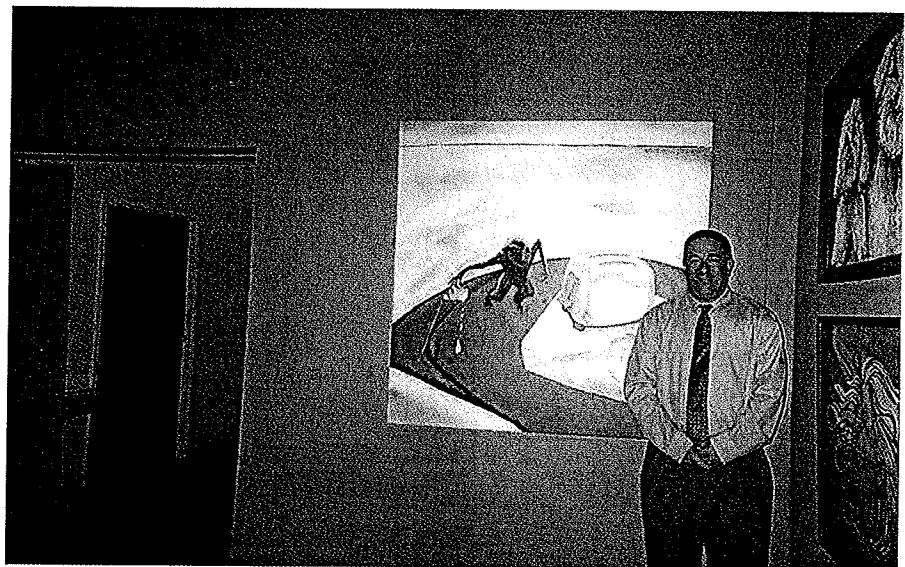
With no possible funding available from the city, EDC looked inward to figure out how a similar program could be established and temporarily housed in one of the vacant storefronts. One EDC member—an independent grocer and owner of Oceana Market in the Eureka Square Shopping Center—played a key

role in first approaching the landlord through its management company and shepherding the project to completion.

Pacifica has an active arts community, which takes the form of the Art Guild of Pacifica with more than 400

The sponsor, Oceana Market, assumed full responsibility for all ongoing operating expenses. It was hoped that some income from the artists themselves—from art shows and use of the space as a venue for other functions—could be reinvested and used to pay the operating expenses and nominal utilities.

Insurance on the space was accomplished through a rider on the art guild's existing policy for a facility elsewhere in Pacifica. Again, Oceana Market offered to reimburse the additional insurance



Author Spano is shown with a storefront gallery painting by artist Richard Herring, Pacifica, California, who is a member of the Art Guild of Pacifica.

members. EDC members and art guild members decided on the goal of establishing a gallery at the shopping center. There was agreement that this would be a great program, but there were issues to overcome that involved making an agreement with the landlord for a "free rent," month-to-month tenancy as well as financing the needed tenant improvements, insurance, and staffing.

The grocer prodded the art guild and landlord to craft a month-to-month agreement, which allowed both parties flexibility. The city of Pacifica was not a party of this rental agreement; the guild would be ultimately responsible for all utilities and upkeep as well as all costs for building out the gallery.

premium until the gallery could become self-sufficient.

Creative Contributions

The biggest obstacle was furnishing the space to accommodate art displays. The empty space—a former martial arts school—needed a total upgrade. Lighting for illuminating the artwork and furniture also was needed. Oceana Market stepped up once more. Its staff installed temporary movable light fixtures, painted the space, upgraded bathrooms, and covered some of the cracked flooring. Art guild members also assisted with the work.

Portability of the lighting fixtures and other improvements was an important

Can't get away?

VIRTUAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The ICMA 2013 Virtual Conference takes place September 22-25.

Register now to take advantage of the full live webcast session schedule beginning September 22! Save \$100 when you register by August 22.

Features of the Virtual Conference for those who can't make it to Boston this year:

■ A live orientation session

■ 23 live webcast sessions with

PowerPoint that include 19 live

web cast educational sessions

and all four keynote sessions

(Amy Cuddy, Daniel Pink,

Beth Simone Noveck and

John Jacobs)

■ You and your entire staff can

attend the ICMA Annual

Conference virtually—no travel

expenses, no time away from

the office.

■ Access to recordings of sessions

for 365 days for continued

learning after the conference.

■ Dedicated technical support

This is your opportunity to

get the tools and resources

you need to succeed...

without ever leaving home!

If you can't go — go virtual!

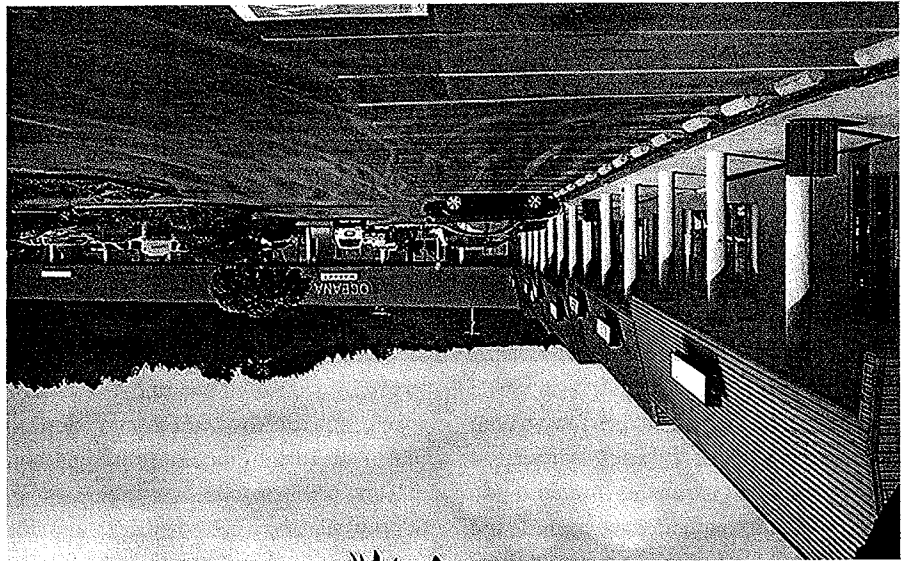
Register today at icma.org/virtual

Market and consisting of art guild members and others, assembled to improve management of the gallery. Their resolve is to increase offerings: gallery rentals to the community, classes, events, and live art (artists working on new art at the gallery itself), as well as possibly trying to attract artists who are regionally and nationally known.

Essential elements for a program like this have been: willing artists, willing landlord, some sponsorship on the part of private business, and some type of entity to carry the insurance for the

consideration in the event the landlord rented the space to a paying tenant, and the installations needed to be easily moved elsewhere. After nearly six months of discussion, an attractive gallery was created.

Numerous artists were recruited to provide examples of their work for the grand opening. Restaurants and the grocer provided complimentary snacks and refreshments for the gala grand opening in April 2012. Nearly 150 people attended. A shopping center with little life had a full parking lot for the first



The storefront Oceana Art Gallery, located in the Eureka Square Shopping Center, Pacifica, California, was founded with the help of a local grocer.

gallery. But such galleries, involving no public funding, can be easily replicated and become community assets.

Pacific's EDC, using the art gallery model, hopes to inspire similar enterprises at no public cost. It is currently researching the establishment of a small business incubator that would also fill a vacant storefront, and it plans to nurture businesses that will in time occupy other vacant stores in the city. **RM**

time in many years. The community has warmly embraced the project.

Art is changed every six weeks, and there are opening night parties attract-

ing large crowds for each changeover.

Staffing of the gallery has not been an issue. Adequate numbers of art

guild members are willing to pitch in to watch over their gallery. Word of

the gallery reached the city's hotel business improvement district, and

hotels have requested fliers on gallery openings for their guests.

Use of the gallery by the public was initially limited to weekends. In March

2013, however, a new group called The Oceana Art Gallery and Arts Collective,

still 100 percent supported by Oceana icma.org/pm



VICTOR SPANO is economic development coordinator, Daily City, California (pacificopportunities@gmail.com). For more information on the Art Guild of Pacifica, visit the websites www.artguildofpacifica.org and oceanarts.org.