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Front row (seated): Jinx Lennon (Gallery Director), Suzanne Nicolaisen (Ambassador), Valorie Ashley (VP Programs)

## Escondido Art Association is Expanding



A new look and direction for one of the oldest art guilds in SoCal.

by Kati Cowan

The "Big Bang" has nothing on the Escondido Art Association (EAA) as expansive actions propel the old organization forward into new arenas.

Newly elected president, Tokeli Baker, a talented artist with an extensive background in non-profit arts management and an impressive portfolio, is the leading force behind all this growth happening at record speed.

With the EAA board's approval, she has already upgraded the website, is expanding outreach, increasing membership, developing new programs, adding more diversity, and

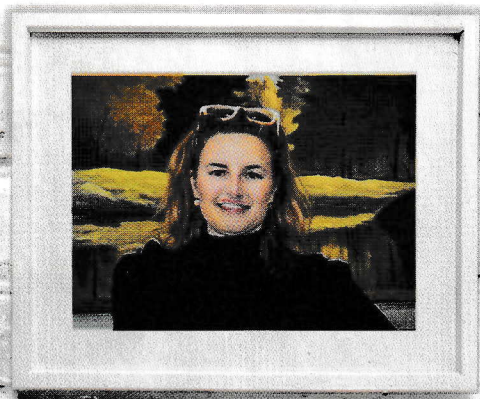
has restructured the organizational system to distribute the workflow more evenly and increase efficiency.

The EAA, formed in 1955 to support artists in our community, has showed resilience and flexibility as the challenges and needs changed over the years. A few decades ago, to give local artists an opportunity to showcase and sell artwork, the EAA added a gallery now located at 121 West Grand Ave.

According to Baker, it is one of the longest continuously operating all-volunteer artist membership guilds with its own gallery that has been recently remodeled sporting a new modern look.

"Art associations do not always have a gallery," said Baker, "and having been able to maintain





*EAA President, Tokeli Baker*

a gallery through all the crises and economic downturns is a testimony of the bond that this group of volunteers have together. They understand the legacy and value of such an organization."

The EAA has always had strong committed leadership dedicated to serving the community, with people like award winning artist and EAA Ambassador Suzanne Nicolaisen, a loved and respected emeritus member who has occupied almost every role on the board.

"I have dedicated close to two decades of my life to the EAA because I love the arts and I believe in what it stands for: service to the community through the arts," said Nicolaisen. "Our mission is to serve the people of Escondido and the surrounding region."

Walking the talk, Nicolaisen was given the Escondido Champion award for her efforts along with her team of dedicated artists among them Gallery Manager Jinx Lennon, artists Carrie Foster, Brenda Townsend, Leslie Meyer, and Cindy Peters. It was for what Nicolaisen calls the "Coloring book of Hope", an EAA led initiative to paint the K-rails during COVID lockdowns.

"Covid didn't drag us down," said Nicolaisen. "The award was given as a thank you for our artistic contribution in the revitalization and beautification of our historic downtown."

Now, with Baker's new direction, the EAA is extending its reach to include all of San Diego and neighboring counties.

"We have reached out to emerging artists of various ages, skill levels and artistic representation

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with some doing cutting edge work," said Baker. "We have artists from Orange County, Temecula, Point Loma, Santee, Chula Vista and San Diego who have joined our valued and loyal membership base," said Baker.

Active recruitment for abstract and paper collage artists, sculptors, photographers, filmmakers, and more is underway.

Enhancing the artistic scope, digital media and photography are now considered an official category in their exhibitions with a new theme for all disciplines each month.

The EAA hosts 11 art demonstrations at Fusion Restaurant and 12 exhibitions annually in the gallery. Members are encouraged to submit their works. All entries are accepted, encouraging, and including more emerging artists from diverse artistic backgrounds. Take-ins are on the first Saturday of each month.

"We have been engaged in social media marketing and casting a larger net," said Baker.

"We are expanding



regionally and attracting younger artists to continue the legacy without losing our beloved long term artist members. Consequently, we are seeing more people submitting works for the exhibition."

A rotating exhibit at the Escondido Public Library, Cute Cakes, the Good Omen Mead, The Grand Escondido and the Hoorah Breakfast Café and Bar in Rancho Bernardo is also part of the EAA's efforts to showcase members' artworks.

"We are now also promoting social media sales on Instagram and adding artist pages opportunities on our new website for our member artists," said Tokeli.



*EAA intern Keyana Harrod, Junior at John Paul the Great Catholic University majoring in Humanities with an emphasis on Illustration, in the EAA gallery.*

There is more. The Education Department is introducing a Masterclass workshop series available to members for a fee and other art classes along with a free after-school class.

A new nine-week college internship gives students an opportunity to earn college credit and to experience gallery operations 10 hours a week. They get to sit the gallery, assist in taking in new artwork and help set up the monthly artists' display and reception. A student from John Paul the Great Catholic University (JPG) is the present intern.

EAA continues to offer the Art Forum once a month for adults, the ever-popular annual Summer Art Camp for children from ages 5 -16, the Kid's Kaleidoscope for children ages K-12 and the High School Scholarship programs for graduating students.

Baker values her connection with the Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Business Association, JPG, the Escondido Arts Partnership {EAP} Municipal Gallery, the California Center for the Arts, MAGEC (Music and Arts Growing Escondido Culture) and more as a collaborative way to serve the community.

Partnering with EAP, Esco Alley Art, The Grand Escondido, and the Patio Playhouse the EAA participates in the College Open House program, a walking tour of historic downtown Escondido that introduces students to local artists, galleries and theaters presenting opportunities and inroads for new emerging artists. Invited students are from JPG, Palomar, MiraCosta and San Diego City Colleges and Cal State University San Marcos.

Another historical partnership serving the veterans of our community is with North County Veterans Standdown. At each event, several EAA volunteers regularly offer art as a therapeutic outlet to veterans and their families to express their feelings and try their hand at painting.

The EAA is always looking for new members with membership open to everyone.

"We have the most reasonable membership rates," said Baker. "Our commission rate for art sales is exceptionally fair at 15%. Our job is to support the artists in our community."

According to Baker, the Association has experienced a lot of movement and expansion in September and October of this year with the highest artist submissions they have ever grossed since their inception. She attributes it to active recruiting regionally and on social media.

By the looks of it, the EAA is on a bang-up trajectory expanding and serving the arts in our region and beyond.

To learn more about the EAA and their local art exhibits and to become a member visit [www.escondidoartassociation.com](http://www.escondidoartassociation.com)





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