



Cultural community is coming to life

By Gordon Swanson and Alan Ziter

Thanks to the long-term vision of our city's elected and civic leadership, a new arts and culture district to benefit all San Diegans is coming to life where Navy recruits once trained. There are few places more suited than San Diego to transform a storied military facility into a civilian arts and culture epicenter. And that is precisely what is happening at NTC Promenade in the former Naval Training Center in Point Loma.

In 1993, 70 years after NTC was commissioned, the Navy announced plans to close it. After that, with extensive community input, the City Council adopted a reuse plan for NTC in 1998 that included a 28-acre, 26-historic building area slated to become a Civic, Arts and Culture District, now called NTC Promenade at Liberty Station.

In 2000, the not-for-profit NTC Foundation was established to raise the necessary funds, manage renovation of the 26 buildings and create and operate a new and exciting cultural community for San Diego residents and visitors. Along with Balboa Park, the NTC Promenade is evolving into a San Diego cultural destination and treasure.

In 2003, the City Council approved a rehabilitation grant of \$5.85 million for the project, funded by a federal loan to be repaid with tax increment dollars generated within the redevelopment district. The grant also included a provision for a second, similar grant of up to \$6 million if certain conditions were met. Those conditions have been met, and the City Council will consider that second grant today. To understand why this investment merits resounding support, consider what has been accomplished and what the new funding would allow.

Last December, the NTC Foundation completed renovations to the first six of our 26 historic buildings with an investment of \$26 million, funded by the 2003 rehab grant, private donations, federal tax credits and other financing. This remarkable investment in our city was made possible by the initial city grant in 2003. But it is what is taking place inside these buildings that makes NTC Promenade a dynamic destination showcasing San Diego's innovative spirit in a community of venues.

Each day a wide array of students, families and residents from modern dancers, ballerinas and watercolor artists to quilters, middle-school science teachers and entrepreneurs enliven our campus. With four tenant buildings renovated, the NTC Promenade is already home to 25 nonprofit and civic groups in residence from the New Americans Immigration Museum, The Watercolor Society and Quilt Visions to Coastkeepers, Walkabout International, Kids Included Together and four resident dance companies in Dance Place San Diego: Malashock Dance, Jean Isaacs San Diego Dance Theater, Butterworth Dance Company and San Diego Ballet – to name just a few.

This year, the NTC Foundation's Event and Conference Centers, and the magnificent outdoor plazas and gardens, will host more than 1,300 community meetings, conferences, festivals, rehearsals and events.

And in October, the foundation launched a new program, The Liberty School, which offers city and county students an innovative experience that enriches standards-based curriculum with project-based learning in collaboration with our nonprofit and civic groups in residence.

The proposed second rehabilitation grant will help us keep our momentum going by allowing us to identify the next phase of rehabilitation from the remaining 20 buildings.

Already, we are exploring opportunities to create new cultural venues in the North Promenade barracks. Here we envision visual artists creating, exhibiting and teaching, as well as working with partners in the science and tech sectors to develop unique resource and training centers.

We are also nearing completion of a major feasibility study for possible uses of the historic 1,800-seat Luce Auditorium located in the heart of the NTC Promenade. The study will consider several scenarios in terms of physical layouts, potential uses, costs and challenges.

The NTC Promenade is becoming what so many of us had envisioned – a flagship destination for arts, culture and innovation. It is another sign of rebirth along the bay and the center of the city of San Diego. Most important, this project is something that would attract residents and visitors, add to the cultural tapestry of the region and make us all proud.

City Council approval of the second rehabilitation grant – with the support and endorsement of the community – would move us a giant step down the path of bringing this vision to life.

We invite everyone to visit NTC Promenade and see what we have already accomplished – and to imagine the magnificent future of San Diego's new cultural community.

■ **Swanson is chairman of the board of directors and Ziter is executive director of the NTC Foundation.**

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