

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **INTERSECTION MURAL, “ABALONE JOURNEY,” CELEBRATES HISTORY THROUGH ART IN ASIAN PACIFIC THEMATIC HISTORIC DISTRICT IN DOWNTOWN**

*Downtown San Diego Partnership Gathers Elected Leaders and Community Stakeholder Groups to Unveil Artwork and Highlight Historical Significance*

**SAN DIEGO – April 11, 2025** – The intersection of Third Avenue and J Street in Downtown’s Asian Pacific Thematic Historic District is now a vibrant teaching tool thanks to a new intersection mural led by the Downtown San Diego Partnership in collaboration with the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association and artists Janelle Louie and Thao Huynh French.

The artwork titled *Abalone Journey* recognizes the history of the Chinese immigrants who helped shape Downtown San Diego’s waterfront and cultural fabric and serves as a visual footprint for the surrounding cultural district and its history. Designated as a historic district in 1987, the Asian Pacific Thematic Historic District was once home to a thriving Chinatown that began in the 1860s and includes more than 20 contributing structures dating from 1183-1930.

“The Asian Pacific Thematic Historic District is a hidden gem of Downtown San Diego and the surrounding Marina neighborhood. Our hope is that this mural helps that gem become a more prominent point of pride for our city and region.” said Betsy Brennan, President & CEO of the Downtown San Diego Partnership. “At the Downtown Partnership we have seen time and again how thoughtful public art like this can serve as an anchor for neighborhood identity and a sense of place. As an intersection mural, this work also comes with the benefit of enhancing pedestrian safety and providing a vibrant activation of public space.”

From concept to completion, the intersection mural was thoughtfully community-driven and incorporated the shared vision of local organizations including the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, Asian Business Association, and the San Diego Chinese Historical Museum, among others. It was funded through Community Parking District funds from the City of San Diego, specifically allocated to support neighborhood-level improvements like walkability, safety, and placemaking through public art and infrastructure.

“Today, we’re unveiling more than just a mural—we’re making a cultural investment that reflects our city’s forward momentum”, said Councilmember Stephen Whitburn, San Diego City Councilmember, District 3. “*Abalone Journey* transforms this intersection on Third and J into a

vibrant landmark of identity and history. It's a prime example of how public art can enhance safety, celebrate our roots, and strengthen community."

The intersection mural tells the lesser-known story of a group of San Diego's early Chinese immigrants; fishermen who arrived in the 1800's, built sailing ships called "junks," and established fishing villages along the bay, including one where the Convention Center now stands. These communities pioneered San Diego's commercial abalone fishery and helped shape the region's fishing industry seen today. At its peak, 18 junks sailed out of San Diego Bay. By 1893, only one junk sailing out of San Diego remained in Chinese hands.

"This mural is a tribute to an often-overlooked chapter in San Diego's history. Even in the face of discriminatory exclusionary laws, the contributions of immigrants, including Chinese immigrants, helped establish San Diego's thriving maritime industry," said Councilmember Kent Lee, San Diego City Councilmember, District 6. "Honoring their legacy in this way reminds us that our city's strength has always come from the diversity of its people and the stories we choose to remember."

Just south of the CCBA and San Diego Chinese Historical Museum, the intersection mural becomes the latest addition to enhance the visual and historical context of the Asian Pacific Thematic Historic District. Other placemaking elements in the area maintained by the Downtown San Diego Partnership's Clean & Safe program include corner planters designed to complement the color palette of the mural and surrounding district, and custom light poles designed after Chinese lanterns that were recently refurbished by the Clean & Safe team.

"This mural recognizes the resilience, labor, and legacy of early Chinese immigrants in San Diego. It tells the story of fishermen, shipbuilders, and community members whose contributions helped shape this city, yet are often left out of mainstream history," said Kathleen Dang, Board Secretary of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association. "At CCBA, we are committed to preserving and sharing Chinese American history, and this mural is a powerful tool that supports that work. It will serve as a lasting reminder of our roots, a place of learning and reflection for the public, and an inspiration for future generations to stay connected to their heritage."

The Downtown San Diego Partnership joined Councilmembers Stephen Whitburn and Kent Lee along with representatives from the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of San Diego, San Diego Chinese Historical Museum, Asian Business Association and others to celebrate the installation with a formal ribbon-cutting on April 11, 2205. Learn more about the art at [downtownsandiego.org/Abalone-Journey](https://downtownsandiego.org/Abalone-Journey).

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*The **Downtown San Diego Partnership** is a nonprofit organization that serves as the principal voice and driving force behind the economic and cultural prosperity of Downtown San Diego*

*through membership, advocacy, enhanced services, and community investment. It also serves as the managing organization for several special districts including the Property and Business Improvement District, otherwise known as the Clean & Safe program, which provides enhanced public services in 275 blocks of Downtown. For more information, visit [downtownsandiego.org](http://downtownsandiego.org).*