



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONTACT: Patty Thayer, Development & Capital Campaign Director  
San Luis Obispo Repertory Theatre  
(805) 781-3889, ext. 15 • patty@slorep.org

### **Funding for Cultural Arts District gains momentum \$300,000 earmarked to help build a new theater and museum; Grant made in honor of Ken and Martha Schwartz**

**SAN LUIS OBISPO** – The Community Foundation San Luis Obispo County has earmarked \$300,000 in grants to help build out downtown SLO’s Cultural Arts District adjacent to Mission Plaza, focusing the bulk of the money on the construction of a new theater and art museum.

The grants will be made from the **Ken and Martha Schwartz Fund**, a donor advised fund held by the Community Foundation. The grants are to be used to help build a new venue for SLO Repertory Theatre (SLO REP) and a new building for San Luis Obispo Museum of Art (SLOMA), officials for the three organizations announced today.

The Schwartz Fund advisors recommended the distribution as an appropriate tribute to Ken and Martha Schwartz, noting that Ken Schwartz, a legendary Cal Poly professor in the College of Architecture and Environmental Design who also served as SLO city mayor 1969-79, spearheaded the creation of Mission Plaza and envisioned a future buildout of a cultural arts district adjacent to the Mission along a portion of Monterey Street.

The Schwartz Fund advisors – architect **Charles Crotser**, former SLO City Manager **John Dunn** and graphic designer **Pierre Rademaker** – were long-time friends of Ken and Martha Schwartz. Inspired by Ken and Martha’s vision and dedication, they established the fund in 2005 shortly after Martha’s death to honor her activism on behalf of beautifying the city, as well as to honor Ken’s vision for the creation of Mission Plaza and his desire to see the establishment of a thriving cultural arts district. The bulk of the fund comes from a gift from the Schwartz estate given after Ken Schwartz’s death in 2019.

The \$300,000 will be distributed as follows:

- \$100,000 to SLO REP for construction of a new downtown venue for live theater.
- \$100,000 to SLOMA for construction of a new art museum.
- \$100,000 has been set aside for future anticipated physical improvements to the Mission Plaza-Cultural Arts District.

The gifts to SLO REP and SLOMA require each organization to use the money solely for construction costs and to “appropriately honor the legacy of Ken and Martha Schwartz.”

The advisors recommended reserving \$100,000 for future cultural arts district improvements, noting that once the Cultural Arts District Parking Structure is completed at the corner of Palm and Nipomo, and both SLO REP and SLOMA have completed their projects on Monterey, the arts district “will be created anew, but will not be finished. ... and we want the fund to be prepared to address desired changes and amenities.”

Ken Schwartz's long-held vision of a cultural arts district gained formal traction when the San Luis Obispo City Council adopted the Downtown Design Plan in the early 1990s. It was most recently updated in 2017 as the Downtown Concept Plan.

Key elements of the plan to create a more vibrant cultural arts district include:

- Construction of the Cultural Arts District Parking Structure at the corners of Palm-Nipomo.
- Construction of a new venue for live theater on Monterey that will be owned by the city and operated by SLO REP.
- Construction of a new art museum to replace the current SLOMA, also on city land, with construction financed by private donors.

Construction on the new 163,000-square-foot Cultural Arts District Parking Structure began on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Vertical construction is scheduled to begin this fall with completion planned by 2025.

The SLO REP venue will be built using private donor financing for the majority of the project. Groundbreaking for the theater is slated for 2025 and expected to be completed in early 2027. SLO REP has raised \$11.3 million of an expected \$15.3 million project, which includes the downtown venue as well as a separate building for set construction, rehearsals and educational programming.

Design, timing and costs for SLOMA's new home are yet to be determined.

The Community Foundation CEO **Heidi McPherson** said, "These grants show the impact philanthropy can have. Ken and Martha's friends saw a need, established a fund, and the contributions over the years – including the Schwartz family's own sizable contribution – will create a long-lasting legacy that will benefit the entire region."

"What a wonderful tribute to Ken and Martha Schwartz. Their devotion to San Luis Obispo was extraordinary," said current **SLO City Mayor Erica A. Stewart**. "Ken's concept of a cultural arts district was truly visionary. He understood that a thriving city has a vibrant downtown with a flourishing arts district."

SLO REP Managing Artistic Director **Kevin Harris** said, "We're very grateful for the contribution. Even more meaningful is having the endorsement of the Schwartz Fund advisors, who are highly respected community leaders. Their belief in our ability to complete this project is inspiring."

SLOMA Executive Director **Leann Standish** said, "Ken and Martha's visionary leadership and generosity is sure to inspire many more contributions. SLOMA's board of directors and staff are fully committed to realizing Ken and Martha Schwartz's vision for a thriving cultural arts district, and we are prepared to meet the challenge of this vision in the years to come."

For more information, including background on the Schwartz Fund and their legacy in San Luis Obispo, please contact Patty Thayer, Development and Capital Campaign Director, SLO Repertory Theatre: [patty@slorep.org](mailto:patty@slorep.org) / (805) 781-3889, ext. 15.

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## **ABOUT THE KEN & MARTHA SCHWARTZ FUND**

The Ken and Martha Schwartz Fund was established at The Community Foundation San Luis Obispo County to honor Ken and Martha's longtime commitment to the City of San Luis

Obispo and their vision for the future of Mission Plaza and improving downtown San Luis Obispo. From 1991 through 1993, Ken served as a member of the Committee which created SLO's Downtown Physical Concept Plan and advocated for the creation of a "Cultural Corridor" as an extension of Mission Plaza. The fund supports the beautification and development of the Mission Plaza area that meant so much to Ken and Martha.

Ken and Martha were married for 58 years until Martha's death in 2004. Both loved the City of San Luis Obispo and cared deeply about the appearance of San Luis Obispo. The Cultural Arts Corridor extending Mission Plaza will always be a testament to the commitment of both Ken and Martha Schwartz and the vision they created so many years ago.

#### **ABOUT THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY**

The Community Foundation San Luis Obispo County, celebrating its 25th Anniversary in 2023, is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization created by and for the people of San Luis Obispo County to support local charitable giving. Since 1998, The Community Foundation has awarded more than \$66 million in grants and scholarships to nonprofit partners and local students. The Foundation's charitable assets under management have grown to \$77 million to provide support to all areas of our community in perpetuity. Learn more at <https://www.cfsloco.org>.

#### **ABOUT SAN LUIS OBISPO REPERTORY THEATRE**

San Luis Obispo Repertory Theatre (SLO REP) is SLO County's only nonprofit, professional regional theatre company featuring a year-round season of live theatre in its intimate downtown San Luis Obispo venue. Established in 1947, SLO REP strengthens theatre's cultural influence and enriches the Central Coast by producing professional theatre, nurturing artists, and providing theatre education for children and adults. The theatre is currently in the final phase of a Capital Campaign to build a new venue in downtown San Luis Obispo's Cultural Arts District, adjacent to Mission Plaza. More information at [www.slorep.org](http://www.slorep.org).

#### **ABOUT SAN LUIS OBISPO MUSEUM OF ART (SLOMA)**

The San Luis Obispo Museum of Art (SLOMA) is an innovative and accessible museum located on California's Central Coast. The museum presents an outstanding exhibitions program that features artists from California and around the world, as well as an ongoing series of dynamic events that engage visitors of all ages. SLOMA is located in downtown San Luis Obispo on the west end of Mission Plaza, at the heart of the city's cultural corridor. A destination for art lovers, and those just beginning to experience art alike, the museum provides a welcoming space and offers free admission to all. More information can be found at [www.sloma.org](http://www.sloma.org).

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