

# Cultivating Community

Artist: Valerie Raps

Completed August 2011

Location Tropicana Shopping Center / 1163 S. King Rd. at Story Rd., San Jose, CA 95122 / Council District 7

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

*Cultivating Community* was created by San Jose artist Valerie Raps. The artwork is part of a larger, comprehensive project, the Alum Rock Cultural History Corridor (ARCHC), which seeks to celebrate the rich cultural history of east San Jose through artworks and other elements. (See ARCHC background below.)

Raps' sculpture is in the form of a life size 'spring-tooth harrow', an iconic piece of farm equipment used to cultivate the land by aerating the soil with curved 'tines' that turn the soil as the harrow is pulled along. In Raps' artwork, ten human arms cast in bronze replace the harrow's curved 'tines', miming the harrow's purpose but with human hands mime turning the soil. The sculpture thus symbolically depicts the many human hands that worked the fields and speaks to the agricultural work and hard physical labor that has been such an important part of the community. It further suggests the idea of cultural diversity and the power of people working together to build community.

The arms in the artwork are castings of real community members, underscoring the artwork's connection to the area and to this community. Each person has a real connection to the idea represented in the work. They are:



- Members of the family of Cesar Chavez including **Rita Medina Chavez**, Cesar Chavez's sister, **Librado Chavez**, his brother, and **Rudy Medina**, his nephew.
- **Hermelinda Sapien**, President /Chief Executive Officer of Center for Educational Training in San Jose is and educator and an activist with deep roots in this community.
- **Raul Lozano**, long-time Executive Director at Teatro Vision in Mexican Heritage Plaza who now, through La Mesa Verde, helps community members learn to grow their own food.
- **Steve Arevalo**, an activist with Filipino farm workers.

- **Mark Anthony Medeiros**, Farm Manager at Veggielution, a community farm located in Emma Prusch Park that is dedicated to “cultivating education, community, and social justice through sustainable agriculture.”
- **Rosa Campos**, an original community activist with deep roots in the early farm workers movement.
- **Hank Imwalle**, senior member of a produce farming family that has been farming in the area for five generations.
- **Chelan Addleman**, community member and long-time manager of the Mayfair Community Garden, facilitating the involvement of the many new South Asian immigrants in the community garden.

*Cultivating Community* was created in partnership with Don Imwalle and Imwalle Stegner Development, the property developer and the San Jose Redevelopment Agency.

#### ABOUT THE ALUM ROCK CULTURAL HISTORY CORRIDOR

The Alum Rock Cultural History Corridor is a group of diverse elements that help to recall, honor, celebrate and engage people in the rich social and cultural history of the Alum Rock/Mayfair neighborhood. The San Jose Public Art Program commissioned Maria De La Rosa, a folklorico artist and cultural historian with deep roots in this community, to research and develop the Alum Rock Cultural History Corridor Master Plan. The Plan maps the many existing elements in this community including historic sites, other public artworks and commemorative signage. It further recommends creation of additional elements that touch on specific themes. Cultivating Community is the first new work to be created in response to the Plan. San Jose-based public artist Diana Pumpelly-Bates served as a advisor to the Plan and to this art project. The ARCHC Advisory Committee was convened by (former) District 5 Councilmember Nora Campos (Chair); Tamara Alvarado, community arts developer at MACLA and 1st Act, and a member of Mexican Heritage Plaza Steering Committee; Don Imwalle, member of an historic farming family; Prof. Alan Levanthal, consultant to the Muwekma Ohlone tribe; Father Javier Reyes of Our Lady of Guadalupe Church; and Rudy Chavez Medina of the Chavez Family Vision.

#### THE ARTIST

Valerie Raps is a San Jose-based artist who works in bronze and cast metal; she works out of the San Jose State University Foundry. She is resident curator at the Art Ark Gallery in the Spartan Keyes neighborhood of San Jose. Ms Raps has exhibited in galleries throughout the area. This is her first public art project.

#### ABOUT THE PUBLIC ART PROGRAM

The City of San José Public Art Program seeks to build community identity by initiating artworks and exhibitions that enhance the civic landscape. Through active community engagement, public art strives to reflect the City’s diversity, historic richness, and envision its present and future.

The Public Art Program is part of the City’s Office of Cultural Affairs, a division of the Office of Economic Development. The Public Art Program was established by a 1992 municipal ordinance that provides public art through funding from City capital improvement projects and eligible private development.

For further information and photos, please contact the San José Public Art Program.