

Designs on Del Paso

Local Entrepreneurs Want to Make Over the Shabby Boulevard

by Sena Christian



There's a bland warehouse on Del Paso Boulevard that sits empty and quiet most days of the month. If you've happened to pass by, you've likely never even noticed the building. But one day each month, that same space comes alive.

The warehouse transforms into an open-air marketplace called GOOD: street food + design market, where artisans sell handmade products and vintage goods and shoppers can check out a DIY station or devour a stroopwafel drizzled with caramel syrup. Now in its second year, GOOD attracts a couple thousand shoppers and nearly 50 vendors to each event. The monthly market, held the first Sunday of each month from May through December, is organized by Unseen Heroes, a Sacramento-based events marketing firm.

"GOOD was the first project launched to create a consistent event to draw people here on a regular basis—not just anyone, but creative entrepreneurs and people attracted to quality design," says Andrea Lepore, who guides branding and retail development for Del Paso Boulevard Partnership, a nonprofit marketing and promotional group.

Lepore, who owns the Hot Italian pizzeria in Midtown, has a personal motto: Tutto è possibile, Italian for "anything is possible." This philosophy manifests itself in her belief that Del Paso Boulevard—a shabby North Sac corridor with a reputation for crime—can remake itself as a hub for the city's creative class.

Lepore believes the corridor can be dense, diverse and walkable, with economic activity hinged on the neighborhood's unique character. Its numerous warehouses and large spaces make it ideal for design-related showrooms and offices that could be leased by firms specializing in, say, architecture or web design.

"This is one of our historic districts," says Lepore. "I'm a big believer in urbanist development. It's frustrating when I see development happening in the suburbs, because then we will always be dependent on cars and not having walkable places to live and work."

Del Paso Boulevard already boasts theaters, a boutique hotel, an artist-in-residence program, public art, notable restaurants and independent businesses, many of them operating out of art deco buildings from the 1920s through the 1940s. The neighborhood originally encompassed a stretch of Highway 40 and flourished after World War II, until a freeway bypassed the boulevard and the growth of nearby suburbs spelled the end of the area's heyday. But the corridor's good bones remain.

"Del Paso Boulevard has so many incredible buildings," says Maritza Davis, who co-founded the GOOD market. "We knew that we needed a big space that had both an indoor and an outdoor area. We also wanted a location that was centrally located. Del Paso Boulevard offered both."

Efforts to revitalize the boulevard began in 1994 when the city council established a special planning district. In 1997, M-1 zoning standards were adopted to allow residential, light-industrial and commercial uses in the neighborhood. The goal: to retain existing businesses and attract new development. The zoning ordinance prohibits some uses, such as adult entertainment businesses, tattoo parlors, auto sales, tobacco stores and laundromats.

Three light rail stops give people from outside the neighborhood a way to get to the boulevard.

And the 32-mile American River bike trail travels along Del Paso on its way from Old Sacramento to Folsom Lake. A \$6.7

million investment in streetscape improvements means nicer sidewalks, better lighting and easier parking for visitors.

So, once you're on Del Paso Boulevard, where should you go? There's Enotria Restaurant and Wine Bar, where chef Pajo Bruich serves upscale New American cuisine. Down the street is Prime Time Boxing, which offers boxing classes, personal training and fitness boot camps. At the 7,000-square-foot So-Cal Speed Shop, customers search for parts for hot rods; the business specializes in cars from the 1940s. Sacramento News & Review is headquartered on the boulevard, along with Schiff Estate Sales, which sells vintage goods, furniture, antiques, art and jewelry.

Several evenings each month, ticket holders wait with anticipation in a small courtyard alit with holiday lights to see the latest show at The Alternative Arts Collective's Blue Box Theatre on the boulevard. Recently, the theater presented an original reimagining of a William Shakespeare comedy, "Midsummer Nightmare 5." Some patrons arrive early to have dinner across the patio at Mama Kim Eats, a Creole-American fusion restaurant that opened in 2012. Or they check out the latest exhibit at the nearby Sacramento Temporary Contemporary art gallery, which opened four years ago.

GOOD market. The Alternative Arts Collective plays. These are only two of the many attractions livening up the boulevard. Poets, graphic designers and muralists recently collaborated to create murals on some of the boulevard's buildings for the Del Paso Words on Walls Project.

Then, of course, there are the numerous brick-and-mortar businesses offering more reasons to visit—and stay awhile.

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