

Low Profile – High Impact In The Community:

East Cape Arts Association

By Walter S. Zapotoczny Jr.

While they may have a lower profile than other non-profit organizations in the East Cape, the Asociación de Artes del Mar de Cortez A.C. or East Cape Arts Association is about as active in the community as it gets. When Russ and JoAnn Hyslop, two retired school-teachers from the United States, moved to Los Barriles in 1992 they found that the local schools did not have an art program. Russ began teaching art classes after school in one of the classrooms. The classes were a success, but art supplies and space were in short supply. The Hyslops knew something had to be done to raise money for the art program.

In the same year, Russ and JoAnn and a small group of residents formed an Art Committee to organize a festival where local artists could show their original work. Their hope was to raise money to support the art programs in the schools. Twenty-five local artists attended this event, which was held in Juanito's Garden R.V. Park on April 2, 1994. The spring Festival de Artes has grown to include over eighty local artists with over 4,000 visitors attending, attracting people from across Baja California Sur.

From these modest beginnings, the East Cape Arts Association continued to grow. It also developed programs for the greater community to work together in a multi-cultural environment. In 1999, the Art Committee formed a private Mexican non-profit organization and established a formal Board of Directors representing a multicultural group of East Cape residents. The Asociación de Artes del Mar de Cortez A.C. is the second oldest Mexican non-profit organization in the East Cape region.

The Association assists local committees in San Antonio, El

Triunfo and El Rosario in establishing their own art festivals. They conduct an annual culture tour featuring homes, artist studios, and historic buildings. An "artist in residence" program has been established where artists from across Mexico come to teach art classes in the East Cape. The artists also work with children in the local schools to create murals. One such artist is Xochitl Rivera from Oaxaca who is teaching students in the secondary school.

Asociación de Artes has also established "El Sarape Magico," a traveling puppet-marionette theater that teaches students how to create a script, make puppets and marionettes, and perform at schools and festivals.

The East Capers is a bi-monthly newspaper published by the Asociación and supported by the local business community. It focuses on art and culture, along with the history of Mexico and the East Cape region of Baja California Sur. Residents are encouraged to submit articles and stories.

Over the years, the Asociación de Artes has become a proud co-sponsor of the Cursos de Verano (Courses of Summer) program for over eighty East Cape elementary and secondary school-age children. A three-week program, Cursos de Verano provides sports activities including volleyball, soccer, basketball, baseball, and swimming. Other activities include jewelry-making, arts and crafts, yoga, kung fu, folk dancing, and English language instruction. Over thirty volunteers from the East Cape assist this program organized by the Mexican National System for Integral Family Development (DIF), members of the business community, and the local Delegado's office.

When Russ Hyslop was teaching those art classes in

the local school in the early 1990s, he often thought that it would be wonderful if there was a place where artists, children and the greater community could meet to learn and exchange culture. Over the years the Board of Directors had discussed the possibility of establishing an Arts and Cultural Center. It would be a facility with a community room for large gatherings and community activities. The building would also include a kitchen, outdoor patio, art gallery and consignment shop, with classroom space for dance and exercise. It was only a dream until Carlos Estrada Talamantes, an East Cape developer, offered 2/3 of an acre of land in the Colina del Sol development, just north of downtown Los Barriles.

The Asociación de Artes del Mar de Cortez A.C. continues to raise funds for art supplies in the schools and their other programs while seeking funding to construct their dream Arts and Cultural Center. They have put together a Fund Development Advisory Committee composed of local residents to assist in this effort. While it may be only a vacant lot and a vision now, if they are successful, this low profile organization will create a high profile facility that provides a gathering point for the greater community to work together in a true multi-cultural environment and celebrate the arts in the East Cape area. To find out more about the Asociación de Artes del Mar de Cortez, A.C., go to www.eastcapearts.com. **BP**



Students and their teacher pose in front of their mural.



Children performing with marionettes.



Summer course children learning a folk dance.



2010 Spring Arts Festival.

Photos courtesy of Brian Cummings