

NIKI DE SAINT PHALLE'S *QUEEN CALIFIA'S MAGICAL CIRCLE*

Escondido – The Cultural Heart of San Diego's North County

The City of Escondido is a vibrant and diverse community of 135,000 that serves as the economic and cultural center of inland North San Diego County. The arts have played an important role in the City's economic revitalization and the thriving downtown Cultural Arts District is home to the \$86 million California Center for the Arts, a major performing arts facility, the Escondido Arts Partnership, the new Mingei International Museum Satellite, the Escondido Children's Museum, 29 galleries and antique stores, Grape Day Park and Heritage Walk Museum and two community theaters.

Escondido's Public Art Commission and its award-winning Public Art Program (established in 1986) have been at the forefront of the City's commitment to the arts. Because of its reputation for excellence, the internationally-renown artist Niki de Saint Phalle selected the City as the site for her gift of *Queen Califia's Magical Circle*, a major sculpture garden that will open to the public in October 2003. This is an event of both national and international cultural significance. It is Saint Phalle's last major project before her death in 2002 and her only large-scale sculptural environment in the United States.

The Public Art Program creates projects that enhance the economic vitality of the city, encourage cultural tourism, commemorate local history and develop community pride and identity. Financed by developer fees and overseen through a nine-member Public Art Commission, over 20 major projects are now located throughout Escondido. A number of these projects have received "Orchid" awards through the San Diego "Orchids and Onions" program, honoring the best and the worst planned and built design projects in the county. Escondido's Public Art Program has been included in *Art on File*, a national registry of recognized public art projects and it has been highlighted for its innovation at the American for the Arts national public art conference.

Susan Pollack manages Escondido's Public Art Program under the auspices of the City's Department of Community Services headed by Don Anderson. A listing of public art projects can be found on the City's website at www.ci.escondido.ca.us/depts/cs/publicart/projects/html.

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