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Their arts in the right place:
ALAC determined to bring arts lovers to downtown Phoenix

First Friday event Jan. 1 kicks off grand New Year filled with Latino arts

The Arizona Latin@ Arts & Cultural Center opened on First Friday, Dec. 4, and is quickly becoming a linchpin for downtown Phoenix's revitalization.

This First Friday at 147 E. Adams St., ALAC will feature a new art exhibit titled "Celebrating the Art of Guadalupe, Our Lady of the Roses," curated by Jim Covarrubias. The show includes works by Moises Salcedo, Melissa Jurado-De la Rosa, and Ignacio Farias.

In the exhibition, 15 Latino artists present their visions of La Virgen de Guadalupe in paintings, photographs, and sculpture. This show premiered at the Phoenix Art Museum as part of the Guadalupe Opera Concert.

First Friday also is a night to "Meet the Artists." Many of the 40 Latino artists showing in the major gallery will be there to greet First Friday revelers. Several artists will be painting canvases of their artwork amid the festivities.

In addition, there will a "live mike" set-up at which performance artists – musicians, singers, actors, dancers – can sign up to present their acts.

ErLinda Torres, President of the ALAC Board of Directors, says that the organization is determined to attract art supporters to downtown Phoenix. "We want to make downtown Phoenix an arts destination, just like Roosevelt Row and Grand Avenue," she says. "One of our goals is to make the heart of Phoenix into a full-scale arts district. We can partner with other arts venues like Symphony Hall, Herberger Theater Center, and the Orpheum Theatre to make that happen."

Adds Ruben Hernandez, Board second vice president, "There is a story unfolding here at our Center that we need to tell," he says. "We already have our Galeria 147 with four galleries and La Tiendita gift shop set up. Now we are renovating this art space for performing arts. Once that is complete we expect that more people will come downtown to experience its growing diversity and vitality."

ALAC as an arts asset to Phoenix is a recent story that has come about through the support of the City of Phoenix municipal officials and the Latino business community. The city provided the arts space and Latino businesspeople helped to raise funds for the fledgling organization, Arizona Latin@ Arts & Culture Consortium. (The name was recently changed from Advocates for Latin@ Arts & Culture Consortium.)

Since then, other arts funders such as the Century Arts Foundation has given a \$50,000 matching grant to ALAC at its Dec. 4 grand opening, the Target Foundation has granted \$7,000 to ALAC, and the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust has funded \$10,000 to ALAC for strategic planning. Other support has come from the Arizona Commission on the Arts and the Metro Phoenix Partnership for Arts & Culture.

Now Latino art organizations are looking to make ALAC their home venue to perform. Several Latino arts organizations are currently negotiating to make ALAC their base. These groups include Cultural Coalition, Teatro Bravo, New Carpa Theater, Opendance, and Flamenco de Sol dance troupe.

“It’s really important for a performance company to have a home,” says Carmen de Novais, the executive director of Cultural Coalition. “By making ALAC one of our primary venues, we can have a place where an audience can come back again and again.”

Arts-driven revitalizations have already occurred in other Valley areas, most prominently in the Roosevelt Row arts district on Roosevelt Street near 7th Street, Melrose art district on north 7th Avenue, and along Grand Avenue north of Van Buren. Valley suburban areas that have found new life through an infusion of culture include the Chandler downtown center, and the “pop-up” gallery operated by the West Valley Arts Council in the Citadelle Plaza in Glendale, among others.

Now its downtown Phoenix’s turn, says Torres. All the new vitality being sparked by ALAC also creates people traffic for local restaurants, shops, and hotels in an arts area. Tourists say they are surprised to find a thriving Latino cultural center in downtown Phoenix because they didn’t read about it in Phoenix guidebooks, she adds.

“What we are seeing is people attending events at the Phoenix Convention Center or staying at the Hyatt wandering into our gallery and gift shop,” Torres says. “They are amazed at the quality of the art, and usually leave the gift shop with a hand-crafted gift or print to take when they return to their homes outside the state. I think word of mouth will spread about the ALAC Center.”