



## TAKING the LEAD

Since her breakthrough job in 1990 as a fellow for the City of San Diego's Commission for Arts and Culture, Felicia Shaw has been advocating for the local arts community with passion and determination. In January, Shaw became the first-ever executive director of the San Diego Regional Arts and Culture Coalition (SDRACC, sandiegoracc.org), a role for which she's been preparing for more than three decades.

BY ALLISON MITCHELL

**Congratulations on your new role. What excites you most?** I have been a part of the SDRACC since its early beginnings. For over 30 years, I joined an army of advocates across San Diego, who worked to ensure that the contributions of the arts and culture sector were valued and embraced as essential to our quality of life. But, for most of SDRACC's history, we operated as an all-volunteer organization. I am thrilled that SDRACC is ready to take our work to the next level and that the board of directors have faith in me to lead our organization forward for the next several years.

**What sparked your passion for the arts?**

I grew up in a family that valued arts and culture, which was integrated into every aspect of our lives. Although my parents were humble, they surrounded my siblings and me with great literature, various music genres and opportunities to cultivate our creativity at home, such as sewing and crafting, gardening and cooking. We sang in our church choir and learned to play instruments; I took dance lessons and went to art school in the summer. They made the arts a priority in our home, and, as a result, the arts have always been a priority to me.

**What do you hope to accomplish in 2023?**

My focus now is on the growth and development of SDRACC with several new initiatives we are launching. One will invest over \$3 million in funding to provide job opportunities for artists living and working in San Diego and Imperial counties. The other initiative is a research project that is designed to measure the impact of the arts on our economy. The most important work that lies ahead will be determining how SDRACC supports the work of a newly established County Arts Commission that has tremendous potential to serve the needs of the arts and culture sector in a way that enables greater access to the arts for everyone.

**Who are some of your favorite artists?**

Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston. They wrote stories in a voice that sounded like my own and shared experiences that may have been different from mine, but were somehow familiar. That is what I look for when I experience art; I want to connect with the characters, images and sounds so deeply that I have a visceral reaction that leaves lasting memories for years to come.