

## SAMA Leaves a Mosaic Legacy in El Cajon

by Shawn Newton

The Mosaic Marathon is an integral part of the annual conference of the Society of American Mosaic Artists (SAMA). The event, which was co-sponsored by Laticrete, Smalti.com, and Wits End Mosaic, brought together our members for an opportunity to create a lasting, large-scale mosaic. The finished piece is donated to a local charity or needy establishment in our host conference city. This year it was in San Diego, California.

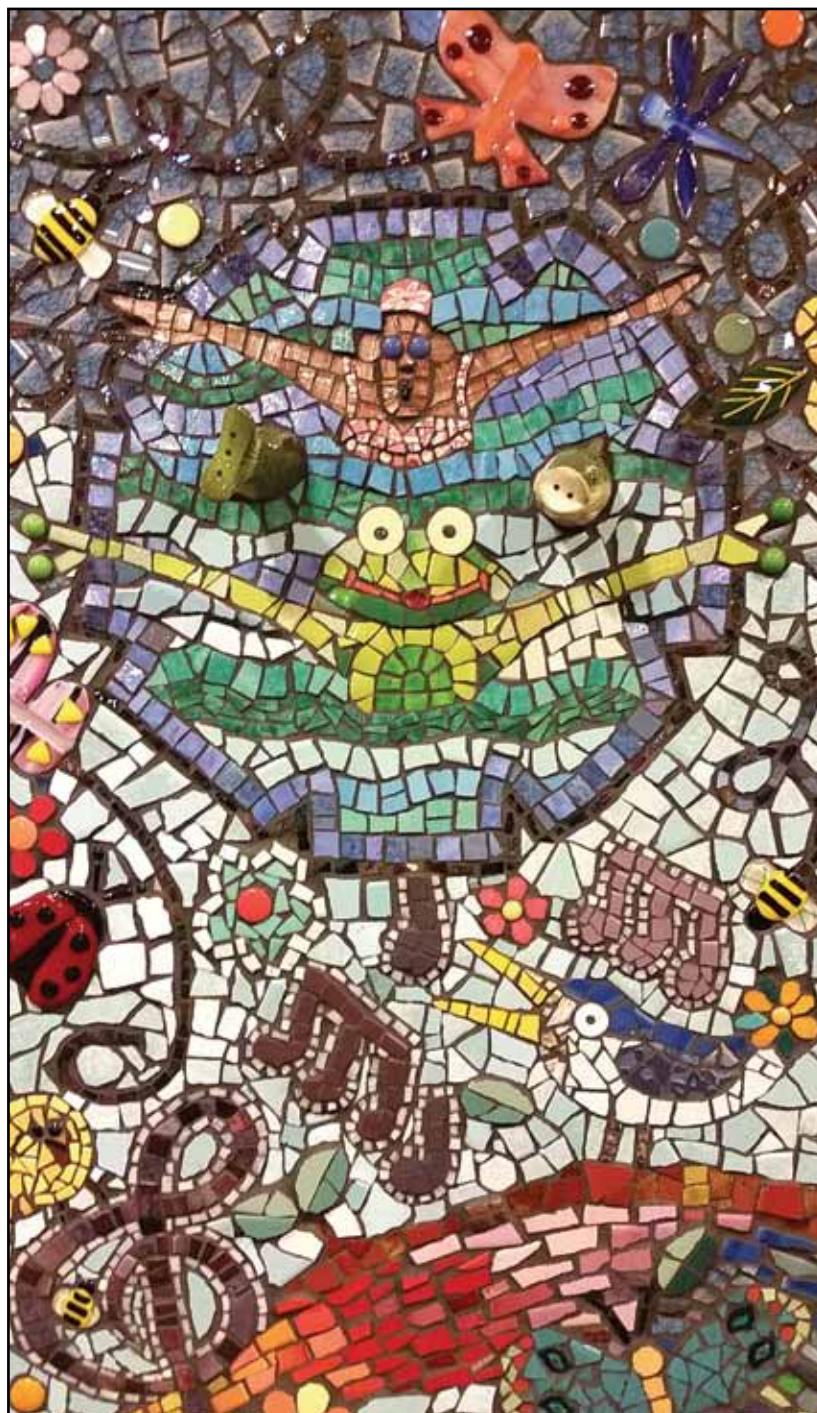
As a nonprofit organization, this is an opportunity for SAMA members to give back to the art community and create a lasting reminder of the legacy of the organization and its mission. The 2016 recipient of the Mosaic Marathon project is the St. Madeleine Sophie's Center (SMSC) in El Cajon, California. The center combines a culture of care and creativity within quality programs to provide liberal arts education, practical skills development, employment, and dignity in order to educate and empower people with developmental disabilities.

### Creating an Inspiring Entrance

Dawn Mendelson and Jolino Beserra served as lead artists for the Mosaic Marathon. Mendelson, a Southern California artist, has led many large and small community projects from fine art to murals. She also serves as program director for Piece by Piece, a non-profit organization that brings mosaic art to underserved neighborhoods in the Los Angeles area. A California native, Beserra creates architectural mosaics for large public and residential installations.

Mendelson described the project. "Our design focused on the programs offered at SMSC in a colorful and inspiring mural that surrounded the entrance to the building. This is the door everyone enters, and we wanted to help make that portal to their center joyful. Because both Jolino and I specialize in pique assiette mosaic, we decided to use a variety of materials, including broken plates, 3-D figurines, ceramic tile, and Mexican smalti, which was generously donated by Wit's End Mosaic. For me, the excitement is often in choosing the materials and envisioning how to interpret their textures and colors into a design."

Three mosaic panels now surround the main entry to the center. Rendered in a tapestry motif, they include references to their aquatic and arts programs, as well as popular garden activities. They also provide a nod to the culinary arts, the new vineyard, and the drama and music programs. The overall comprehensive design reflects the



*A close-up view of Swim Panel, which was installed to the left of the entry at St. Madeleine Sophie's Center in El Cajon, California. Materials include broken plates, 3-D figurines, ceramic tile, fused glass, and Mexican smalti.*

*Photo by Dawn Mendelsohn.*






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playful and creative expressions found in SMSC artists' work. To honor and acknowledge the center's 50 years of service, their own artists created 50 fused glass elements as well as mosaic flowers to be included in the mural.

## The Value of Sharing Creativity and Passion

Mendelson sums it up: "The most valuable experience in both leading and participating in the Mosaic Marathon at SAMA is the creating of community, the exchange of ideas and techniques, and the feeling of support and camaraderie. There is collaboration and teamwork, new friendships are forged, and old ones are rekindled. There is laughter and chatter, as well as deep discussions and moments of intense concentration and quiet. And there is giving back.

"As artists, two of our most valuable assets are our creativity and our passion. Sharing this with others who may not have that experience or who could use the support is incredibly important. I love that the mission of the SAMA Mosaic Marathon is not only to leave a legacy of our art form in the city to which we've come, but also to contribute to that local community in a way that lifts people's spirits and reminds them of the power of art."

The entrance to this building serves as the entry to many of these participants' days and lives. SAMA hopes it has given them a joyful vision that reflects the very nature of their creative and generous selves.

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Visit [www.americanmosaics.org](http://www.americanmosaics.org) to learn more about the Society of American Mosaic Artists and its upcoming events.

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