

## 2016 Governor's Historic Preservation Awards

Project: **Little Italy San Diego Interactive Mobile App**

In 2010 the Geography Department at San Diego State University, through the Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Youth and Space (ISYS), began collaboration with San Diego's Little Italy Association (LIA) to research and document the rich history and geographies of San Diego's Little Italy neighborhood. A \$40,000 grant was secured from the National Park Service through the Preserve America program, with matching funds committed by LIA and the office of County Supervisor Ron Roberts. The long-range goal of this project was to increase opportunities for heritage tourism in Little Italy, with research and documentation representing the first step in this direction.

Over 150 images were collected of the neighborhood as it existed in the past, and more than 12 hours of video of interviews conducted with ten key individuals who resided in the neighborhood more than 50 years ago. One of the individuals also provided a guided tour of the neighborhood which was captured on video. The research and documentation phase of the project resulted in the design and development of a special heritage component of the Little Italy Association's website, with information, photos, and videos about local history. This information was then used in the development of a printed map, an interactive online map through Google Earth, and eventually the Smartphone Application that is the subject of this nomination.

The Little Italy San Diego Interactive Mobile App allows visitors of all ages a tour and broad overview of the origins of Little Italy from the 15th century to the 20th century. It features a combination of audio narratives, soundbites, videos, photos, and augmented reality all within 10 to 15 stops. The tour provides an insight into the Italian immigrant experience by allowing the user to hear personal anecdotes and memories as told by some of the oldest residents of Little Italy. For children, an animated child-mascot, Danny Boy, leads visitors around the neighborhood, to experience videos, photographs, games, and a quiz. For adults, the App provides a guide to all the area's landmarks, restaurants, and artistic and cultural offerings.

This innovative tool has transformed Little Italy into a walkable museum, showcasing San Diego's Italian-American heritage in a way that has never been done before. The cultural assets of the community can now be promoted while keeping up with the quickly changing social media and information channels used more and more by visitors and residents. The effect on the Little Italy community has been seen in the number of visitors who, utilizing the information in whatever formats available to them, have greater appreciation and understanding of the businesses, the people, and the buildings around them. With that new awareness, visitors come back to Little Italy again and again with a renewed sense of familiarity with the neighborhood and with enduring admiration for its Italian-American heritage.