

International Exhibition of Cultural Appreciation

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What started off as a small project in 1987 to simply capture images of Phoenix Sister Cities has become an international exhibition of cultural appreciation.



MORE THAN TWO DECADES AGO, a one-of-a-kind program was introduced in the Valley for the first time ever, showcasing cultures from across the world through the eyes of Phoenix photographers. Errol Zimmerman and Peter Ensenberger, two Phoenix men representing the original project, took seats as committee chairmen for the project with the Phoenix Sister Cities Commission and co-founded Through Each Others Eyes (TEOE). Their first project involved the exchange of Phoenix-based photographers with those from Sister City Himeji, Japan. "The idea was for photographers to capture images of a culture new and different to them and, as a result, we would see how the Japanese viewed us as well as how we viewed Japan and the Japanese people," Zimmerman says. "It was a great success."

The project grew into a nonprofit organization in 1999, which sought funding from local corporations. The first TEOE fundraiser took place in the middle of October 2011, yielding a spectacular attendance of more than 350 people. "I think our fundraiser [in October] helped launch us into a new category among photo-oriented service organizations," Zimmerman says. According to Zimmerman, the nonprofit's ultimate goal is to contribute to the greater good of society. "From comments in public settings, political rhetoric and newspaper articles, people in our state are becoming more polarized and more xenophobic. Our voice is to help people understand and appreciate cultural differences and to celebrate the cultural diversity in the Valley and around the world. We have had more than 100 traveling exhibits showing people in nine countries that our differences can unite us, and not divide us," he says. More than two million people have viewed the exhibits, presenting images of Prague, Czech Republic; Havana, Cuba; Hermosillo, Mexico; and various other cities.

Outside of uniting the world through photography, Zimmerman notes much of the nonprofit's success is due to its local projects. The organization holds picture days that have supplied 10,000 school children with free photo packages for families who couldn't afford them otherwise. TEOE is also a part of a large exhibit at Sky Harbor Airport showcasing the ranchers and their families who have played a part in the last 100-year history of the Valley, started by a fellow organization member, Scott Baxter.

In the future, TEOE hopes to carry on its exhibits around the world, sponsor more photo projects and continue to educate the youth of the Valley on the importance of diversity and cultural acceptance.

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Through Eachothers Eyes

www.teoe.org