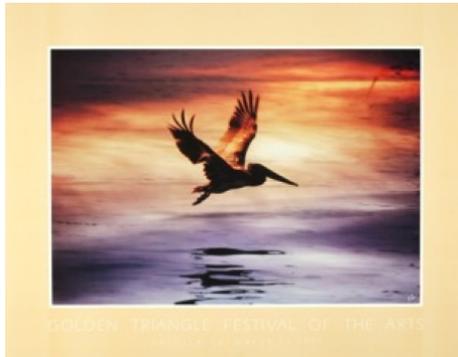
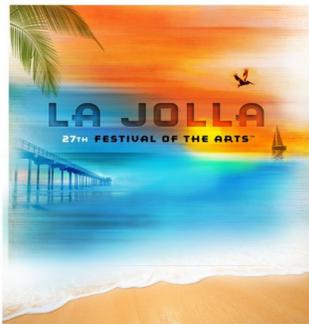


## ‘Spirit in Flight’ Will Fly Again

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*Written by Kari Kovach*

Forty-five years ago, a crisis with the Brown Pelican awakened the world to the unintended consequences of DDT use. Nearly 30 years ago, that same Brown Pelican introduced a few hundred people to what was a tiny art show paired with a simple taco bar. Now, when the La Jolla Festival of the Arts celebrates its 27th year this June 22 to 23 at UC San Diego Warren Field, thousands of visitors will engage with nearly 200 artists in an intimate setting of original fine art, entertainment, cuisine, wine and craft beer. They will have been notified of the popular event via a cheerful image, illustrated by the now-iconic graceful Brown Pelican photograph by Dallas Clites. Artist Clites' involvement began years ago, prompted by a national conservation crisis.

As a boy living in a small town in Iowa, Clites suffered from asthma and chronic bronchitis, leading his family to move to San Diego, where the weather allowed him to roam outdoors.

In 1968, at the age of 21, Clites became a photographer for the San Diego Museum of Natural History. At that time, Dr. Joe Jehl, the curator of the Department of Ornithology and Mammalogy, was participating in a national research project on the declining population of the Brown Pelican. It was determined that pesticides like DDT, among other pollutants, caused the Pelican eggshells to be too thin and incapable of supporting the embryo to maturity. Clites was asked to photograph the collapsed, thin-shelled eggs – a telling photo later seen by public officials as well as the general population.

Clites' photograph of alarmingly wrinkled eggs on a burlap bag captured national and international interest. The Brown Pelican campaign received the attention it deserved; with evidence mounting of the pesticide's declining benefits and increasing toxicological effects, DDT was ultimately banned in 1972. And, within a decade, the Brown Pelican was on its journey back from the endangered list.

In the ensuing years, Clites curated museum photo exhibits, was a staff photographer, owned a successful commercial photo/studio and established a gallery in Jackson Hole, Wyo. He ultimately returned to San Diego, where he participated in hundreds of community and national art events and volunteered locally with the San Diego Zoo, Quail Gardens, East African Conservation Society and others. During this time, Clites became a member of the Torrey Pines Kiwanis Club. There, his experience, ideas and talent quickly helped inspire a new Club program.

Sue Ehrhardt, wife of Kiwanis member Ross Ehrhardt, had lost her leg in a water skiing accident in 1977. Later, on a visit to Durango, Colo., she saw Dave Spencer, a fellow amputee, gliding down the hill, and asked him to teach her how to ski on one leg. That experience inspired the Ehrhardts to launch a program to help other disabled individuals experience the freedom of skiing.

When Clites entered the scene, the Kiwanis members were selling See's Candy to raise funds for the new ski program. Recognizing the need for higher returns, Clites recommended an art festival. Soon enough, he developed a business plan, capitalized on the professional expertise of the other Kiwanis members and enlisted community volunteers. In May 1987, the originally-titled Golden Triangle Festival of the Arts was up, running and a determined success in its first year.

That first Festival sought an image to capture its spirit. Clites remembered his first professional image on the plight of the Brown Pelican and its healthy return 10 years later.

"One morning I set out for a spot where I knew the Pelicans took off," he recalled. "The silhouette of the Pelican, and a special filtration on my camera lens, became the first festival poster. 'Spirit in Flight' was my symbolic contribution, perhaps, too, a subconscious gesture in support of the individuals the festival was benefiting."

Since then, the Torrey Pines Kiwanis' now-named "La Jolla Festival of the Arts," has raised more than \$1.7 million for local adaptive-sports and recreation programs serving over 40,000 disabled San Diegans. This year's beneficiaries include organizations providing everything from golf and therapeutic horseback riding to junior wheelchair sports camp and wheelchair rugby. And, of course, adaptive skiing.

Clites now sits on the Festival's show jury or is a judge, ecstatic to see the event move robustly into the future. And, his Brown Pelican photograph has become a special reminder of Clites' indispensable early leadership.

This year's Festival poster brings the Brown Pelican home. Digital mixed-media artist Jeff Adamoff incorporates "Spirit in Flight" into his own original piece for the 2013 artwork.

"When I saw the Pelican in 'Spirit in Flight' I knew it was the perfect fit," he said. "All by itself, Dallas produced an amazing piece of work. It seems to 'fly' perfectly and feel right at home in the new art."

As Clites reflects on his path, he recalls all the people, places and opportunities that helped him get here: "It's an honor they're using 'Spirit in Flight' in this year's event. It reminds me of my part and the contributions of others who have been involved in the La Jolla Festival of Arts, and all the individuals it has benefitted."

Clites now lives in Escondido, where he is finishing a book on his life through photos and stories. It details, he says, his experiences as a volunteer, founder, artist, photographer, naturalist and adventurer. He expects the book to be released later this year and to help and inspire others to start on their own adventure.

For more information on this year's La Jolla Festival of the Arts, visit [lifa.org](http://lifa.org).

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<http://lajolla.patch.com/groups/arts-and-entertainment/p/spirit-in-flight-will-fly-again>