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# Spotlight on grant honorees, Dean Mayo and Bob Marra: capturing a new scene in Coachella Valley

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photographer with a keen eye. A writer with a passion for telling thought-provoking stories. That winning combination may be a big and impactful benefit for Greater Palm Springs thanks to **Dean Mayo and Bob Marra**.

Mayo and Marra have been active creators in the desert for more than 15 years now; **Mayo is a noteworthy photographer and Marra is a writer**, and, more recently, the head of Marra Market Intelligence.

Joining forces, the duo hopes to create compelling new stories through images and words geared to assist some of **Coachella Valley's most impacted arenas**, stretching from lower-income individuals to those whose health may be impacted in various regions.

The genesis of their idea is captivating.

Mayo told Marra about a Riverside County project through the *California Desert Arts Council*. At the time, Marra coincidentally was exploring an extensive report by Desert Healthcare District about the impacts of the social determinants of health in Eastern Coachella Valley.

"I'm a bit of a history buff," Marra says, "And all this reminded me of President Roosevelt. After the Great Depression, as part of the New Deal, he hired thousands of reporters and photographers to go out into the country and to document the benefits of what was being purchased with

the New Deal. What ended up happening is the Dust Bowl brought to the fore various issues, **based on those iconic photos.**”



Some of those prominent photographs changed the approach the U.S. government took in allocating resources.

“**It changed a lot of people’s lives** because those pictures told the story that no one knew that much about,” Marra notes. “That’s the analogy here. That’s where I came up with the idea of photos with stories to highlight what’s happening here.”

The duo decided to focus on how various determinants affect people’s health.

“We’re trying to paint a story of where has the Valley been in the past, where is it now, and where it’s going,” Mayo adds.

It’s a bold mission and one that recently garnered more steam when Mayo and Marra received a ***Creative Corps Inland SoCal Grant*** through the **Inland Empire Community Foundation**. These new resources will allow the creators to create thought-provoking works.

“My greatest hope is that we’re able to illustrate these issues that are known to be extreme problems and challenges in Eastern Coachella Valley,” Marra says. “These are the ones that often are not told or that are just reported on one time, but it’s more just about the issue.

“**We want to help the leaders in the region**, both in the community and those elected, pursue ways to change things,” he adds.

Mayo says so far, their endeavor has been eye opening. That may not come as a surprise to those who know of Mayo and Marra’s work.



Mayo, a longtime **PGA golf instructor**, launched his photography business nearly 15 years ago out a devotion to maintaining his PGA status. Initially, his subject matter revolved around Palm Springs golf courses. Suddenly, the stunning scenery within a few hours of his home forced him to take pause.

Those landscapes proved to be equally as interesting and over time, the photographer leaned into components of

exposure and composition to effectively capture scenes that brought out the personality of his subject.

**Marra's passion** has shown up through the articles he's written for *Palm Springs Life* and other media outlets. Now at the helm of Marra Market Intelligence and its signature publication *GPS Economic Monitor*, his creative eye is always open.

Marra Market Intelligence explores, reports, and consults on a wide spectrum of economic matters, key industry sectors, and emerging trends in Greater Palm Springs. An editorial board and consulting services round out the mix.

Looking ahead, **Mayo is eager to create new works through the grant.**

"Kaiser Permanente is doing a community outreach in some areas where they'll bring a mobile van and offer medical attention to areas in need, and that's going to be a very interesting story we start in January," he says. "We're also looking at the new sports park that was built in Mecca."

Areas impacted by natural disasters come into play, too.

**"Our goal is to paint and tell that story,** then have a couple of public forums where we can hopefully bring attention to various issues," Mayo says. "I'm trying to get a meeting with Congressman Raul Ruiz, because he's a perfect example of somebody who grew up in Coachella, became a doctor, and now is a congressman.

"I would love to get his input on what he sees in the area," he adds, "because a lot of these things depend on federal funds as well as state funds. The more we're doing it, the more we're finding out that there's a huge need to **bring awareness in these areas.**"

Learn more at [iegives.org](https://www.iegives.org).

*This story originally appeared in the **Desert Sun** January 2024.*

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