Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Jean-Pierre Conte Helped Light The Bay Lights Twice. Here's How the Bay Bridge Got Its Glow Back

Our Friends · Wednesday, November 4th, 2026

A crowd lined the railings at Pier 14 on the evening of March 20, 2026, waiting on a switch. Lighting was scheduled for 7:40 p.m., and the show ran a few minutes late, leaving spectators "holding their breath," the student newspaper **Golden Gate Xpress reported**.

Then the western span of the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge lit up again, for the first time in about three years. A new system of 48,000 custom LEDs now runs on the bridge every night from dusk to dawn.

Jean-Pierre Conte helped make it all possible. Illuminate, the nonprofit behind the artwork, named him a key funder of the original installation and said he stepped in again to support its return.

The First Bay Lights

Artist Leo Villareal's installation first lit up in March 2013 with about 25,000 bulbs strung on the bridge's cables, KQED reported. It ran nightly for a decade.

Fog, wind, salt and exhaust took a toll. Ten years in, its bulbs were "failing faster than they can be repaired in a cost-effective manner," **ABC7 reported**, after years of grit, grime and constant vibration. They went dark in March 2023, around the installation's 10th anniversary.

Raising $11 Million From Scratch

Illuminate set out to raise $11 million for a new system built to last. When the lights went out, the campaign stood at a little over $51,000.

It got there. Every dollar came from private donors, more than 1,300 of them, through a mix of larger gifts and grassroots support, Illuminate said. Conte, founder and managing partner of his family office, Lupine Crest Capital, is listed among the **nonprofit's core supporters**.

Jean-Pierre Conte on Supporting the City

Jean-Pierre Conte called the project"a gift to the public" and "a reminder that wonder still belongs in the center of civic life."

Choosing what to support is personal, in his view. He has urged business leaders to "identify what

you are passionate about supporting," as he put it in a June 2025 **Forbes Business Council column**. His family's foundation, the J-P Conte Family Foundation, is **based in San Francisco**.

He's also written that support shouldn't stop at one donation. That point was made in a column on wildfire prevention.

"Remain an involved community member," Jean-Pierre Conte wrote.

Photo: Lars Mai via Pexels

CLICK HERE TO DONATE IN SUPPORT OF OUR NONPROFIT COVERAGE OF ARTS AND CULTURE

This entry was posted on Wednesday, November 4th, 2026 at 3:26 pm and is filed under Check This Out
You can follow any responses to this entry through the Comments (RSS) feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.