

Media Contact: Briana Sapp Tivey
Director of Marketing and Communications
Email: bsapptivey@sbnature2.org
Phone: 805-682-4711 ext. 117

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Curator Jan Timbrook Retires: 45 Years of Preserving Cultural Heritage

Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Curator of Ethnography Jan Timbrook, Ph.D., looks back on a long and successful career working with Native Americans to preserve valuable artifacts of material culture

(Santa Barbara, CA – April 2, 2019) — Curator of Ethnography Jan Timbrook, Ph.D., is retiring from her position at the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, where—for the last 45 years—she has worked to preserve Native American material culture. Dr. Timbrook has conducted her work in close collaboration with native communities to document culture and facilitate native access to artifacts. She has built particularly strong ties between the Museum and local Chumash communities, and will continue to strengthen those relationships as she transitions into the role of Curator Emeritus of Ethnography.

Prior to working at the Museum, Timbrook studied anthropology and art at University of California, Santa Barbara, and volunteered at the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden. Her knowledge of anthropology, art, and local botany have served her well in her specialties of ethnobotany and basketry.

Through diligent outreach, fundraising efforts, and luck, Timbrook grew the Museum's collection of Chumash baskets from three to 50 (the most in any museum, including the Smithsonian). Chumash weavers have studied these baskets to revive traditional techniques. Museum visitors have benefited from Timbrook's expertise in basketry and other aspects of native material culture in the series of exhibits she developed, revealing the diversity of native artistry through baskets, textiles, beadwork, and more. Her scholarship has also helped raise awareness of how some native cultures that did not practice traditional agriculture skillfully managed plants in natural ecosystems to maximize their uses, especially for basketry.

Timbrook's doctoral thesis on traditional Chumash uses for (and beliefs about) plants was published as a book, *Chumash Ethnobotany: Plant Knowledge Among the Chumash People of Southern California* (Heyday Press, 2007). Timbrook's ethnobotanical research relied in large part on reports by the famous ethnographer and linguist J.P. Harrington, who interviewed native people about their cultures during the first half of the twentieth century. Harrington recorded the cultural knowledge of many local Chumash people at that time, notably including Mary Yee, the last person to be raised speaking any Chumash language as a first language.

This knowledge has also been incorporated into the Museum's exhibits, in the form of the *Sukinani'oy* Garden, where interpretive signs teach visitors about the native names, uses for, and beliefs about a selection of plants of significance to the Chumash. The garden's name means "bringing back to life" in Barbareño Chumash. The name was given by Mary Yee's descendants, who have worked with Timbrook to encourage the revival of Chumash culture.

James Yee—the grandson of Mary Yee—gave a prayer and blessing in Barbareño Chumash at Timbrook's retirement party at the Museum on Saturday, March 23, expressing gratitude to the Creator "for blessing Jan with 45 years of service here at the Museum, years spent tirelessly for the happiness of people." At the party, Timbrook was surrounded by friends, collaborators, and colleagues, many of whom were from local Chumash communities. The party began in the *Sukinani'oy* Garden and concluded in Santa Barbara Gallery, where



Timbrook was presented with a beautiful redbud winnowing basket handwoven by Mono basketweaver Julie Tex.

About the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Powered by Science. Inspired by Nature. Founded in 1916, the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History inspires a thirst for discovery and a passion for the natural world. The Museum seeks to connect people to nature for the betterment of both, and prides itself on being *naturally different*.

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