

PRESS RELEASE
November 29, 2023

For more information, contact:
Stephanie Evers Armstrong
Director of Marketing & Communications
sarmstrong@sbnature2.org
805-682-4711 ext. 117

SB Museum of Natural History Appoints Hiroko Benko and Amanda Lee as New Trustees

SANTA BARBARA, CA— Hiroko Benko and Amanda Lee have been appointed to the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History's Board of Trustees for a three-year term.



Benko brings a wealth of knowledge from many fields - foreign service, international relations, administration and management. She has worked around the world: Tokyo, Sweden, Beverly Hills, and Santa Barbara. She came to the United States from Japan and is the president of the Condor Express, known to some as "the Commodore" and launched Condor Express Whale Watching in 2002 with her late husband, Captain Fred Benko. The enterprise built the vessel without propellers to protect marine wildlife. Her focus is to continually improve the Condor Express experience and to seek exciting and new charter cruise experiences.

Benko recently joined the Santa Barbara Channel Whale Heritage Areas as co-chair. The organization is comprised of a group of whale enthusiasts: whale watching tour operators, naturalists, biologists, fishers, educators, museum directors, resource managers, ocean-friendly restaurants, artists, and NGOs all working together to heighten the awareness of the abundance and diversity of whales in the Santa Barbara Channel. She additionally has served on the board of Santa Barbara Maritime Museum.

With profound knowledge and genuine enthusiasm for Santa Barbara, Lee considers it a gift to share the region's rich history, stunning architecture, mountains, and ocean views with all who come her way. Her family has long been patrons and supporters of the Museum as it is home to countless priceless memories for them and their children. She is dedicated to helping preserve the history and unique offerings that the Museum provides for future generations of Santa Barbarians and visitors of the area.

Having grown up in the Bay Area, Lee made Santa Barbara her home over 20 years ago. A UCSB graduate in 2006, Lee gained invaluable experience in public relations, working with a boutique firm in Santa Barbara, representing clients in diverse industries including surf and action sports, as well as fashion. However, her lifelong passion for home design and architecture led her to venture into real estate in 2015, specializing in Montecito, where she resides with her husband, Travis (who was born and raised in SB) and three children, Cash (12), Harper (9), and Navy (almost 2). Lee has since become a trusted expert in the Santa Barbara County real estate market.





###

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*. For more information, visit sbnature.org.