



**PRESS RELEASE**  
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## **Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Raises \$500,000 for Education Programs**

*Annual fundraising event exceeds goal while celebrating Sea Center's reopening*

**Santa Barbara, CA** — The Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History's 22nd Annual Mission Creek Gala, the Seahorse Soiree, took place Saturday, April 30 at the newly reopened Sea Center on Stearns Wharf, and exceeded its fundraising goal with a total of \$500,000.

172 guests enjoyed a lovely reception in the Sea Center's first floor exhibit area that included interactions with the small sharks and rays in the Shark Cove and sea anemones in the Intertidal Wonders touch pools. Guests made their way to a clear tent on the wharf for the big décor reveal. The tent décor was designed by Joy Full Events, Inc. and Hogue & Co. and included beautiful seahorse centerpieces. There were six specially themed tables that represented elements of the Sea Center's new exhibit Dive In: Our Changing Channel. The Sea Grass tableau, the Pelagic tableau, the Kelp Forest tableau, the Rocky Intertidal, and the Sandy Bottom Lair were each sponsored by a Museum trustee and were uniquely designed to reflect the theme.

Between courses prepared by duo catering, guests enjoyed a spirited live auction hosted by Museum Teen Programs Manager Charlie Thrift. Thrift is a former Quasars to Sea Stars teen program participant, and even provided the student testimonial at the 2020 Gala. After dinner Sea Center volunteer and Quasars to Sea Stars teen program participant Lucy London spoke passionately about why the Sea Center and Museum are so important.

Museum President & CEO Luke J. Swetland made an appeal to the crowd and quickly raised \$220,000. The Liquid Beauty raffle item was a beautiful malachite and diamond necklace by Sheryl Lowe Designs with a magnum of Sea Smoke Chardonnay. The night ended with guests enjoying dessert and dancing in the Sea Center lobby.

The Gala Honorary Committee consisted of Stacey Byers, Carolyn Chandler, Sheri Eckmann, Venesa Faciane, Elisabeth Fowler, Heather Hambleton, Ken Kelly, Annette Kowblansky, Bobbie Kinnear, Patty MacFarlane, Nancy Martz, Nanette Nevins, Susan Parker, Holly Pieretti, and Pam Valeski.

The Museum aims to inspire a thirst for discover and a passion for the natural world, and maintains a commitment to providing exceptional educational programs for the Santa Barbara community. The Mission Creek Gala sustains the Museum's outstanding nature and science education programs which touch the lives of more than 10,000 school children each year through school tours, classes, storytelling, camps, and the Nature Collection lending library.

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The annual Gala has raised more than six million dollars for school programs since it began in 2000. The Museum Access Fund (MAF) is a scholarship program provided by the Museum and Sea Center to visiting school groups in need of financial assistance. Schools with a 50% or greater enrollment in the federal Free or Reduced Price Meal Program may apply for scholarships through the MAF application. This fund was created to provide access to Museum programs for low-income schools. Donations also enable the Museum to provide programs at a reduced rate to those schools which do not qualify for the MAF. Funds raised by the Museum's annual Gala enable the Museum to offer these reduced/waived fees.

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**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 connects people to nature for the betterment of both.



Sea Center on Stearns Wharf lit up for the Seahorse Soiree

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Sandy Bottom Lair table inside the tent on the wharf

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Heather Hambleton and Melissa McCann  
enjoy the opening reception at the Seahorse Soiree