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Uniquely Educational and Sustainable 'Study Loop' at Moro Canyon in Crystal Cove State Park to Result from \$1 Million Gift

Gift to Crystal Cove Alliance with Charitable Fund at Laguna Beach Community Foundation Supports Immediate Environmental Education and Future Sustainability

CRYSTAL COVE, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--May 30, 2013--

An unprecedented \$1 million gift that will develop a unique educational and environmental treasure in the Moro Canyon section of Crystal Cove State Park has been donated by Laguna Beach philanthropists Michael and Tricia Berns. The gift was announced today by the Crystal Cove Alliance (CCA), the nonprofit dedicated to education, conservation and restoration, in partnership with the nonprofit Laguna Beach Community Foundation.

The gift will create, and help sustain, the Berns Environmental Study Loop, a half-mile of mini-field stations where visitors can perform valuable and educational "citizen science" endeavors. Whether the visitor is a child on a school field trip, or a recreational hiker curious about the natural surroundings, the study loop promises to deliver unique learning experiences and an opportunity to help the Park understand the ecosystem. The Berns' donation also covers development of infrastructure elements such as an enhanced amphitheater, fire pit, interactive displays and a pavilion.

Construction began this month, with completion slated for October. The study loop is part of a 35-acre restoration in Moro Canyon and serves as a starting point for exploring over 17 miles of backcountry trails and 3.2 miles of undeveloped beach. "This is the largest educational gift donated to California State Parks and the first gift that creates not only capital improvements but also sustainable funding for an onsite educator," according to CCA President Harry Helling. Already, the Berns Environmental Study Loop is being viewed as a model for other parks.

Michael and Tricia proudly call the study loop "our legacy project."

"This is our 'backyard' -- where we hike and mountain bike two or three times a week. We love it here. And we feel strongly that school-age children should learn the importance of protecting our environment," Michael explained. "Learning in the new study loop, amidst this spectacular expanse of nature, will be much more motivating than sitting and learning in the classroom. And we know recreational hikers and mountain bikers also will welcome the additions."

The \$1 million donation is divided, with half used to build the infrastructure and interactive features of the study loop, and the other \$500,000 placed in a charitable fund at the Laguna Beach Community Foundation.

Darrcy Loveland, President and CEO of Laguna Beach Community Foundation, explains that the charitable fund is the ideal way to ensure sustainability. "When fully funded, the charitable fund will cover, in perpetuity, costs associated with a staff person to develop, coordinate and implement education and interpretation programs, as well as maintaining the facilities and surrounding areas."

"Crystal Cove Alliance is thrilled to start this charitable fund with the Berns' generous gift and have established a goal of \$1 million to pay for education and maintenance forever. We are half-way there! For those seeking significant projects, naming opportunities are available," Helling added.

Tricia Berns noted, "As long time supporters and Ambassadors of the Laguna Beach Community Foundation, we are pleased that Crystal Cove Alliance established a charitable fund at the Community Foundation to carry our gift into perpetuity, knowing that the fund will attract additional gifts from like-minded individuals. "

While school children are one target audience, two other audiences will use the new study loop. One audience will come from local universities, conducting research onsite. One of the mini-field stations is being developed with UC Irvine. The second audience is the recreational user of Moro Canyon, whether on foot or on bike, with mini-field stations attracting nature-lovers of all ages. Activities for individuals and families will be found at the amphitheater and pavilion -- such as a stargazing party or a campfire with education and fun.

For information on donations to a Crystal Cove Charitable Fund at the Laguna Beach Community Foundation, please contact Darrcy Loveland at darrcyloveland@lagunabeachcf.org. For information on donations to Crystal Cove Alliance, please contact Jackie McDougall at jmcdougall@crystalcovealliance.org. General information on Crystal Cove State Park can be found at www.crystalcovestatepark.com.

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