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Support groups get helping hand

New foundation says it will offer help and education to local nonprofits with technical aspects of serving.

By Barbara Diamond

The Laguna Beach Community Foundation, a group dedicated to helping local donors assist nonprofits, went public Tuesday.

Foundation Chairwoman Laura Tarbox announced the launch of the Laguna foundation in a special presentation to the City Council, the audience and those watching on television..

"The purpose of a community foundation is to focus on charitable giving in a particular geographic region or affinity group," Tarbox said. "Our mission is to encourage philanthropy in the greater Laguna Beach area through its charitable organizations and residents. We are not competing with existing organizations."

To the contrary, the foundation will offer support and education to the city's nonprofits, many of which do not have staff or resources to adequately address such issues as tax, legal and insurance requirements, board responsibilities and conduct, development, fundraising and planned giving, Tarbox said.

Workshops are planned and dates and locations to be announced. The first educational seminar will be on the topic of IRS filing and tax compliance, Tarbox said.

She also expects the foundation will be making grants within a year from the interest earned on an endowment fund-seeded with an anonymous \$500,000 donation.

"They got off to a good start," Laguna Art Museum Director Bolton Colburn said. "It has a lot of potential."

Colburn was among the group of nonprofit representatives who attended a May 6 gathering at Aliso Creek Inn for the soft launch of the foundation. Marion Jacobs also attended the gathering, representing No Square Theatre and the Laguna Foundation of the American Assn. of University Women.

"I think if they can do what they say they will do, it will be of great benefit," Jacobs said. "I feel positive about the plan. Now let's see it happen."

The foundation's website contains a list of local nonprofits, a bulletin board where messages can be posted, a calendar of events, the history of the foundation, a list of its functions and biographies of its trustees — many, if not all, familiar faces in Laguna.

"We are all longtime Laguna residents who have been involved in many of the nonprofit organizations in town over the years," Tarbox said.

Laguna's foundation has been in the works for about six years, founded by former Mayor Wayne Peterson, Laguna Canyon Foundation President Michael Pinto and former Executive Director Mary Fegraus and board member Peter Kote.

The four did the spade work for the community foundation, meeting with an attorney to determine the required organization, filing for a nonprofit tax status and recruiting trustees. However, the project gained momentum this past year with the addition of Rick Balzer, Robert Gamez, Richard Crum, Bob Dornin and Tarbox to the board.

The board has busied itself in formulation policies, and Executive Directors Robert Sheldon and Amanda Ferrari were hired at the first of the year, Tarbox said.

“Both are attorneys with many years experience in the nonprofit world, especially in the area of planned giving and fundraising,” Tarbox said. “Laguna is a unique community with untapped resources that can be awareness and education.”

“Many folks ‘Love Laguna,’” Tarbox added, quoting a popular slogan, “but don’t know enough about local organizations out there to know who they want to support or the best way to do it.”

The board intends to tap into those resources for additional giving through large donations, donor-advised funds and “planned giving,” which is giving through strategies that are put in place by estate planning, often through a will or a trust.

For more information about the foundation, call (949) 375-7968 or visit www.lagunabeachcommunityfoundation.org.

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