



# SESSIONS

Forever Balboa Park's Biannual Newsletter

FALL 2024



SESSIONS FALL 2024

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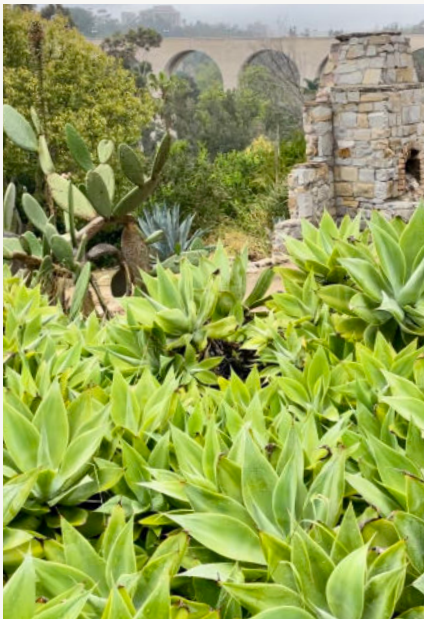
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A Letter from the Interim Co-CEOs

# Dear Balboa Park Friends & Supporters

As we reflect on this past year, we are incredibly proud of the progress made at Forever Balboa Park. Together, in our dual roles as Interim Co-CEOs and as VP of Planning and VP of Institutional Advancement, we have had the privilege of working with our dedicated teams to bring several transformative projects to life that enhance the park's accessibility, beauty, and impact.

This spring, we celebrated the installation of eight strategically placed wayfinding signs throughout the park. These signs do more than just guide visitors—they create a sense of arrival, ensuring that everyone can seamlessly explore Balboa Park's 1,200 acres while enjoying the revitalized parkwide map. The signs not only improve navigation but also enhance the identity of Balboa Park, fostering a stronger connection with all who visit.

We are also particularly proud of our efforts to revitalize the historic Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden. From concept to completion, this project involved trail repairs, plant inventory, new interpretive signs, and an automated irrigation system—all with the goal of honoring the park's botanical heritage while creating a sustainable, beautiful space for generations to come.

Another exciting accomplishment is our plant identification project, which now spans all three mesas of the

park. By installing QR codes for plants and trees, we've made it possible for visitors from around the world to feel more connected to Balboa Park's diverse ecosystems. This innovative approach allows anyone to learn more about the park's flora with just a quick scan, making the experience both informative and inspiring.

One of the most historic and transformative projects we are thrilled to be part of is the ongoing Botanical Building and Gardens Revitalization. With Phase 1, focusing on structural restoration, complete, we've now started on Phase 2. This next phase will not only preserve the building's historic integrity but also enhance the surrounding gardens, improve accessibility, and create new spaces for education and community gatherings. Our goal is to ensure that this iconic structure remains a vibrant centerpiece of the park for generations to come.

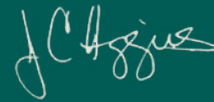
As we look toward the future, we remain committed to advancing these projects and exploring new ways to enhance the visitor experience while fostering inclusivity, sustainability, and respect for the park's rich cultural and ecological diversity.

This fall, we're excited to launch our **"Growing Together"** campaign, through which we will highlight how Forever Balboa Park is empowering the park to thrive as a destination that

enriches lives and connects people with nature. We hope you will be inspired by the milestones realized in Balboa Park to donate in support of our mission.

We are so grateful for your continued support and partnership. Together, we will ensure that Balboa Park remains an exceptional destination—one powered by the people, for the people. Let's continue growing together, creating a lasting impact and legacy that future generations will cherish.

Sincerely,



**Jackie Higgins**  
Interim Co-CEO & VP of Planning  
Forever Balboa Park



**Phillip Sammuli**  
Interim Co-CEO & VP of  
Institutional Advancement  
Forever Balboa Park



## To Our Valued Supporters,

This past year has been an exciting and transformative time for Balboa Park, and I am honored to have stepped into the role of Chair for the Board of Trustees during such a pivotal moment. With a renewed sense of purpose, we are thrilled about the milestones ahead.

We are eagerly anticipating the reopening of the Botanical Building and Gardens, a revitalization project that will be a highlight of the park's ongoing restoration efforts. With the support of our dedicated park lovers, we are excited to bring this iconic project to the finish line.

Additionally, we look forward to welcoming Katy McDonald as our new President & CEO in mid-November, further strengthening our leadership as we embark on future endeavors.

Thank you for your continued commitment to preserving and enhancing the beauty and history of Balboa Park. Your support makes all of this possible. We are grateful to be growing together as we continue to nurture and enhance the beauty of Balboa Park.

With Gratitude,



**Victoria L. Hamilton**  
Chair, Board of Trustees  
Forever Balboa Park



# Growing Together



**FOREVER  
BALBOA  
PARK**

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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# sPARK AWARDS WINNERS A NIGHT OF CELEBRATION & INNOVATION

This May, Forever Balboa Park hosted its second annual **sPARK Awards**, where over 200 attendees gathered to honor the incredible innovations and community contributions that are shaping Balboa Park and our city. The evening was a celebration of creativity, collaboration, and the inspiring projects that are making a lasting impact. We were thrilled to honor the following organizations, which received a \$5000 cash reward to support their efforts from the San Diego Foundation.



## CROSSING BOUNDARIES:

### **Museum of Us and Friends of Friendship Park, Border Wall Preservation**

Recognized for fostering understanding and connection through the preservation of several invaluable sections of art on the U.S.-Mexico border wall.

## IGNITING INNOVATION:

### **San Diego Automotive Museum, IGNITE Academy**

For their forward-thinking approach to providing career exploration, independent research, and skill-building via project-based learning in order to prepare students for internships and other pathways towards successful careers in the automotive industry.

## ENHANCING ECOSYSTEMS:

### **CleanUp Kitsune**

A Japanese-inspired performance art project honored for picking up litter at Balboa Park and public events and providing environmental media, waste services, up-cycled goods and generating consumer awareness through education, culture, and creativity.

*To learn more about the winners, visit [4-bp.org/spark](https://4-bp.org/spark)*

## A Big Thank You!

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all our nominees for their remarkable efforts, as well as to our **generous sponsors, table hosts, speakers, and volunteers** who helped make the night so memorable.

Together, we are creating a brighter future for Balboa Park. Thank you to everyone who joined us in celebrating these trailblazing achievements.

sPARK Awards were generously supported by:

### Park Catalyst



### Park Partner



### Park Ally



## DnD BioBlitz Adventure:

# MERGING ART, SCIENCE, & FANTASY

On July 26, Zoro Garden in Balboa Park became the gateway to a magical world where art and science collided in celebration of Comic-Con weekend. EcoLogik Institute and Forever Balboa Park, in partnership with Cosplay for Science, IF/THEN, and the Los Angeles Zoo, hosted a DnD-themed BioBlitz that brought together over 300 participants for an unforgettable adventure.

Park visitors were invited to immerse themselves in this free event and engage in a variety of activities that blended creativity with scientific inquiry. From designing their own costumes to exploring the wonders of paleontology through interactive demonstrations and models, attendees were drawn into a vibrant world of discovery.

The heart of the event was the BioBlitz, featuring both main and side quests designed and orchestrated by EcoLogik Institute's Conservation and Environmental Stewardship Apprentices. These young environmental stewards crafted a unique experience that invited participants to explore the park's biodiversity while contributing valuable data to community science.

The **EcoLogik Institute** is a groundbreaking program that connects young women to nature through engaging, hands-on experiences in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. As part of **Forever Balboa Park's commitment to offering free educational programming that inspires environmental stewardship**, EcoLogik empowers participants to become innovators, environmental leaders, and changemakers in their communities, fostering a positive impact on the world around them.

The success of this youth-driven initiative, which so perfectly merged fantasy with reality, has inspired us to continue this program in the future. We extend our deepest gratitude to all who joined us for this enchanting day and helped bring this magical event to life.





# CULTIVATING GROWTH

## OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH TRACE STUDENTS

At Forever Balboa Park, we believe in nurturing both our park and the community that surrounds it. One of our most rewarding collaborations is with San Diego Unified School District's TRACE program, an initiative dedicated to assisting students as they transition from high school to adult life.



## ABOUT TRACE

**TRACE (Transition Resources for Adult Community Education)** is a vital part of the district's continuum of services, focusing on empowering students to become as independent as possible within their own communities. Guided by Individualized Education Plans (IEP), Transition Plans (TP), and Person-Centered Plans (PCP), TRACE provides personalized support to help each student reach their full potential.

IN THE 2023/24 SCHOOL YEAR,

**TRACE students contributed an impressive**

**1,205**   
**volunteer hours**

**helping to maintain and enhance the park's renowned gardens.**

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN BALBOA PARK'S GARDENS

As part of their hands-on learning experience, TRACE students contribute to the maintenance of Balboa Park's beloved Inez Grant Parker Memorial Rose Garden, Zoro Garden, and the Desert Garden. Under the guidance of Parks and Recreation's grounds maintenance leads, these students take part in a variety of tasks, from planting and pruning to learning about plant care and garden management.

This collaboration not only enhances the beauty of our gardens but also provides invaluable life skills and vocational training for the students. By working in the gardens, they gain practical experience, a sense of accomplishment, and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to their community.

We are proud of the positive impact this partnership has on both the park and the students. As we continue this program, we look forward to expanding opportunities and deepening our connection with the TRACE community.

A heartfelt **THANK YOU** to the TRACE students and staff for their dedication and hard work. Your contributions help keep Balboa Park blooming and vibrant for all to enjoy.



## New Signs Guide You to the Heart of Balboa Park!

We are thrilled to announce the recent installation of new **"Welcome to Balboa Park"** signs, unveiled on June 4. These signs are a significant enhancement to the park's identity, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere for all who visit.

The signs are strategically placed at key entrances to the park at:

***Laurel Street Entrance  
North and South Ends of Park Blvd  
Pershing and Upas near Bird Park***

By marking these vital gateways, the signs help create a stronger sense of arrival, guiding visitors to the heart of Balboa Park. Located on all three mesas, they ensure that no matter where you enter, you are welcomed with a clear invitation to explore the beauty and heritage of this iconic space.

This project was made possible by a generous grant from San Diego Foundation. Thanks to their support, we have been able to enhance the visitor experience and reinforce the park's identity as a cherished destination for both locals and tourists.





TOUR PROGRAM EXPANDS

## More Inclusive Tours Enhance Accessibility & Visitor Experience

We are excited to announce the expansion of our Tours Program at Balboa Park, designed to enhance accessibility, inclusivity, and visitor engagement. With new and ongoing tours, we're committed to offering enriching experiences that cater to a diverse audience.



## Enhancing Accessibility & Inclusivity

Our expanded tours program aims to make Balboa Park's history and natural beauty accessible to everyone. Whether through specialized themes or increased frequency, we strive to offer a deeper connection to the park for all visitors.

In addition to our special tours, we offer **free weekly tours** that provide ongoing opportunities for exploration and learning, **Tuesdays and Fridays at 11 a.m.**

**Tour Schedule:** Tuesdays and Fridays at 11 A.M.

**Registration:** Not Required



## The Balboa Park Women's History Tour

In collaboration with the San Diego History Center and the Women's Museum of California, we proudly launched the Balboa Park Women's History Tour. This Forever Balboa Park volunteer-driven initiative highlights the significant contributions of women who have helped shape Balboa Park and beyond, thanks to our impactful partnerships. Due to popular demand, the Women's History Tour was continued monthly. These tours offer a fantastic opportunity to explore the rich history of the park and celebrate the influential women who have impacted this cherished space.

**Tour Schedule:** Third Saturday of each month at 10 A.M.

**Registration:** Required



## Horticulture Tour

Our Horticulture Tour, led by volunteer Bill Edwards, offers an engaging exploration of Balboa Park's diverse plant and tree species. This tour provides insights into the park's horticultural wonders and the unique characteristics of Balboa Park and the ecosystems found here.

**Tour Schedule:** Second Saturday of each month, focusing on a different topic each month

**Registration:** Not Required

## Personalized Tours

We also offer custom tours for groups.

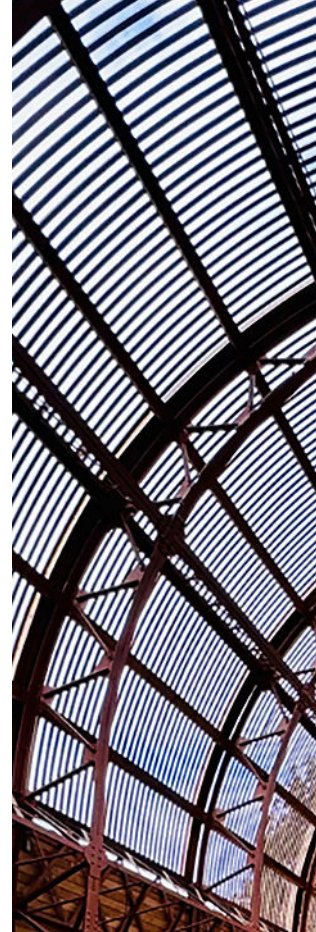
Call (619) 239-0512.

# BEHIND THE SCENES OF THE BOTANICAL BUILDING & GARDENS



## Celebrating 110 Years

As the Botanical Building and Gardens in Balboa Park approaches its **110th anniversary**, a major revitalization effort has reached a key milestone. This project aims to preserve the beauty and historical significance of one of the park's most iconic landmarks while enhancing the visitor experience for generations to come.



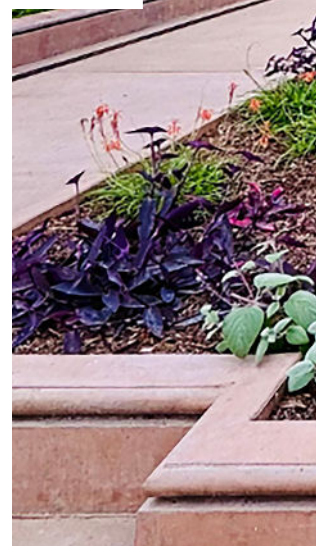
## PROJECT PROGRESS: Phase 1 Complete

We are thrilled to announce the completion of Phase 1, a monumental effort achieved through partnerships with the City of San Diego, Spectra Company, EC Contractors, Nan Sterman, Parks and Recreation, and many others. This phase focused on restoring the building's structural integrity and historical features, preparing it for the next chapter in its storied history.



## LOOKING AHEAD: Phase 2

Led and funded by Forever Balboa Park, Phase 2 is set to transform the surrounding gardens and improve accessibility throughout the area. Highlights include the reconstruction of the historic pergola, construction of ADA-compliant paths, the restoration of historic fountains, and intricate work on the urns and balustrades, which have been featured in our recent social media updates. These enhancements will ensure that the beauty of the Botanical Building and Gardens is accessible to all visitors while preserving its historic charm.





## Fundraising and Community Support

While the building restoration is complete, the full vision of this project has yet to be realized. Community contributions are essential to completing Phase 2, and there are various ways to support the effort. Donors can leave a lasting legacy with personalized recognition opportunities and contributions to the restoration of key architectural elements. Your support will help bring the gardens back to their former glory and create a space that future generations will cherish.



### Want to be part of the Botanical Building and Gardens next chapter?

Scan the QR code to learn how you can contribute to the ongoing restoration efforts, join the BOT Corps, and get updates on the grand opening event.



# THE KATE O. SESSIONS CACTUS GARDEN



The Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden was developed in 1935 under the direction of its namesake. Today, Forever Balboa Park monitors and cares for this garden, with the help of our volunteers and in partnership with the City of San Diego. Over the years, a tremendous need for improvements in the historic garden has arisen.

The need for revitalizing the cactus garden was heightened in 2022, when an act of vandalism left the garden in a critical state. The main irrigation source was severely damaged, leaving this garden without a water connection source; the walking trails were flooded and ruined; and several plants were stolen or severely damaged.

In the wake of 2022's vandalism, Forever Balboa Park worked with the city and key partners to:

- Repair the flood-damaged walking trails
- Fund installation of a protective cage around the repaired irrigation system
- Deploy volunteer Garden Stewards to salvage and replant several of the damaged cacti

# Enriching the Cactus Garden



## ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

Forever Balboa Park staff and summer interns meticulously inventoried the cacti and plant species, compiling in-depth information into an interactive map. Visitors can access the map and learn more about the garden's plants by scanning a QR code in the garden.



## STREAMLINED MAINTENANCE SYSTEMS

Before the renovations, the garden could only be watered manually with water-filled buckets. The garden is now equipped with a centrally controlled irrigation system that can be operated with a mobile device, tremendously simplifying routine maintenance.



Balboa Park's First Bilingual Sign

## Thank You for a Thriving Garden

### Labor & Trail Restoration

#### California Conservation Corps (CCC)

Trail restoration and repair with dedication and hard work.

#### Garden Stewards

Tireless commitment to garden care and upkeep.

#### Recognizing our project partners:



### Leadership & Visionary Contributions

#### Nancy Carol Carter

Historical research for garden renaming in honor of Kate O. Sessions.

#### Joe Fisch & Joyce Axelrod

Visionary leadership and financial support for essential trail repairs and new signage.

### Infrastructure & Sustainability

#### Hunter Industries

Grant for installing centralized irrigation, supported by Southwest Environments.

#### City of San Diego Parks & Rec

Fast repairs of vandalized water sources, ensuring sustainability.

### Enhancing Biodiversity

#### Bill Beckman

Donations of numerous cacti and succulents to enrich the garden's biodiversity.

### Mapping & Digital Learning Resources

#### Michael Bostwick, Dean Karras, & Former Intern Alexis

Inventoried and identifying plant species, resulting in the creation of an online garden map and educational resource.

#### Alexis & Sophia Galvez

Formatting plant inventory for the website.

#### Brigitta Rehn

Designing the interactive online map and learning resources.

# Our Volunteers: Charting Success in Balboa Park

At the heart of Balboa Park's ongoing preservation and growth are our dedicated volunteers. Through their efforts, we continue to expand and improve vital areas, such as the Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden, and take on new initiatives, like the Trees for Health Garden identification project. Their commitment is essential to the success of new programs, like Tree Maintenance Stewards, the Nat Garden Corps, and the Botanical Building Garden Stewards.



## VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

In honor of our volunteers' tireless efforts, we hosted a Volunteer Appreciation Dinner during Volunteer Appreciation Week in April. Testimonials from our volunteers reflected their deep connection to the park and their passion for giving back to this beloved space.

### SUMMER INTERNS SPOTLIGHT

We are also proud to recognize the contributions of our summer interns, **Payge and Alex**.



**Payge** spearheaded the National Carousel Day efforts, bringing fresh energy and creativity to one of the park's signature events. She also worked on Trees for Health Garden.



**Alex** took charge of the Trees for Health Garden identification map, providing crucial updates that help park visitors explore and learn about our diverse tree species.

As we continue to grow our volunteer base and expand programs like the Nat Garden Corps and Tree Maintenance Stewards, we are grateful for the lasting impact our dedicated volunteers will have on Balboa Park. Each volunteer hour logged represents another step toward ensuring this iconic space thrives for generations to come.

## Volunteer Impact by the Numbers



# 442



## Total Volunteers

including one-time and group volunteers



# 346

## Recurring Volunteers



# 30,092

Total Volunteer Hours  
a **17.4% increase** from  
FY 2022/2023 hours

## Cost Equivalent

# \$1,161,881.69

reflecting the immense value of their  
contributions to the park



# A JOYOUS CELEBRATION AT THE BALBOA PARK CAROUSEL!

**National Carousel Day at the Dorothea Laub Balboa Park Carousel** was a vibrant celebration of history, community, and fun! The event featured free carousel rides all day, live performances, and family-friendly activities that highlighted the rich legacy of this beloved park icon. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all who joined us and to the dedicated sponsors and volunteers who made the day unforgettable. Your continued support ensures that the Balboa Park Carousel will remain a cherished piece of our history for generations to come!

## THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!

**Lazy Acres:** Your nutritious snacks kept our volunteers energized throughout the day.

**Blend San Diego:** Thank you for providing our beautiful National Carousel Day banner, which set the festive tone for the event.

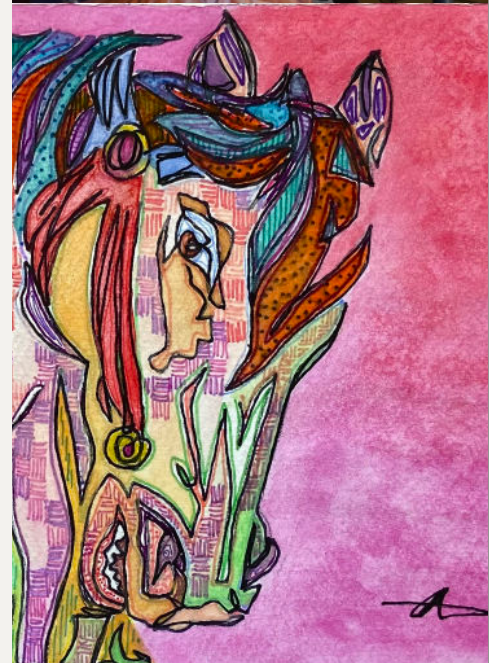
**Events 365:** Your generous support was invaluable in making this day such a success.

A special congratulations to **Amanda Ochoa** for her stunning artwork, **Carousel Horse**, which won this year's art contest. Amanda's design will be featured on greeting cards available at our Visitors Center, with proceeds supporting enhancements in Balboa Park.

We are immensely grateful to our **35 volunteers**, who collectively contributed over **88 hours** of service to make the day run smoothly. Your dedication is the heart of our community efforts, and we couldn't have done it without you!

To everyone who participated and made **National Carousel Day** a huge success—thank you! Together, we continue to keep the carousel spinning and the joy alive at **Balboa Park**.

Stay connected: [4-bp.org/bpcarousel](http://4-bp.org/bpcarousel)





# Celebrating Design & History in Balboa Park

## WORLD DESIGN CAPITAL

We are thrilled to take part in World Design Capital San Diego Tijuana 2024 programs! Like other participants, we are committed to using design as a tool for social, cultural, and economic transformation. We will be in the Pavilion on November 1 from 10 – 11:30 AM.



Be sure to visit the World Design Pavilion in Balboa Park, located less than 300 feet from the ongoing revitalization of the historic Botanical Building and Gardens. This close proximity highlights our dedication to preserving our rich history while embracing innovative design solutions for a sustainable and vibrant future.



# Grants Awarded

In the past 12 months, Forever Balboa Park has been awarded over \$530,000 in grant funding. We are extremely grateful to the following charitable foundations that make our work parkwide possible.

## OPERATING SUPPORT

Beyster Family Foundation Fund at San Diego Foundation  
The Favrot Fund  
The Harbaugh Foundation  
Price Philanthropies Foundation  
Walter J. & Betty C. Zable Foundation

## VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Art Pratt Foundation of Old Mission Rotary  
Cox Charities Community Grants  
Heller Foundation of San Diego

## BOTANICAL BUILDING, PHASE 2

Ellen Browning Scripps Foundation  
Hervey Family Fund at San Diego Foundation  
Hunter Industries Charitable Giving  
National Trust for Historic Preservation

## PARK IMPROVEMENT

Hunter Industries Charitable Giving (Kate O. Sessions Cactus Garden)  
San Diego Gas & Electric (Plant It Forward)

## YOUTH INITIATIVES

Conrad Prebys Foundation  
Dr. Seuss Foundation  
Henry L. Guenther Foundation



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