



**Media Contact:**  
Mary Lynn Harms-Romo  
Director of Communications  
[marylynn@sbscchamber.com](mailto:marylynn@sbscchamber.com)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

November 1, 2024

**Goleta's Finest 2024 Award Recipients Announced**

*Community Awards Gala to be Held on December 6 at The Ritz-Carlton Bacara*

The Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce, from Goleta to Carpinteria, is thrilled to announce the 2024 Goleta's Finest Award Winners. Goleta's Finest, a cherished 74-year tradition, honors extraordinary individuals who have contributed significantly to the Goleta community, making it a better place to live, work, and grow.

Kristen Miller, President & CEO of the Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce, remarked, "Goleta is a community where service and generosity run deep, and we are proud to honor these remarkable individuals. Each honoree has made an impact on the lives of others, strengthening the foundation of our community. We look forward to celebrating their contributions and highlighting the legacy they are creating for future generations."

The 2024 honorees will be recognized at a formal celebration on December 6, from 5:30 to 9:00 PM at the elegant Ritz-Carlton Bacara. The evening will feature dinner followed by an awards ceremony, a perfect occasion to commemorate these distinguished community members.

**The 2024 Goleta's Finest Award Recipients Are:**

**Man of the Year – Bill Macfadyen**

*Presented by American Riviera Bank*

Bill Macfadyen has made a profound impact on the Goleta community. He is an unwavering advocate for nonprofits and small businesses, a mentor and community leader.

As the founder and publisher of Noozhawk.com, Bill has revolutionized the South Coast media landscape with the region's only 24/7 professional news site. Leading a dedicated team of journalists, he has committed himself to the pursuit of sustainable local news in the digital era. Bill's passion for community-driven journalism began with the South Coast Beacon, a weekly newspaper that gained recognition with the California Newspaper Publishers Association's General Excellence Award.

Beyond journalism, Bill's contributions include service on several key local boards, such as UCSB's Economic Forecast Project, Santa Barbara Partners in Education, and the Westmont College Foundation to name a few. He served twice as board chair for the Goleta Valley Chamber of

Commerce and was named Entrepreneur of the Year in 2008 by the organization. His dedication to education and public welfare also shines through his work with the Journalism Education Association, which honored him with the Friend of Scholastic Journalism Award in 2012. A respected entrepreneur and community advocate, Bill's leadership and vision continue to foster growth and civic engagement across the South Coast.

### **Woman of the Year – Joanne Funari**

*Presented by Fauver, Large, Archbald & Spray*

Joanne Funari has been a dedicated supporter of the Goleta community and surrounding area for over 30 years, dedicating her time and expertise to various local organizations. A prominent leader in the banking sector, she has strengthened community ties through her work and volunteerism.

Currently an executive at American Riviera Bank, Joanne has played a pivotal role in expanding community banking services in Goleta, helping local businesses and individuals achieve their goals. Her commitment to Goleta extends far beyond banking—she has served on various local boards, including the Santa Barbara Police Foundation, UCSB Economic Forecast Project, and Santa Barbara Zoo. Joanne also has a deep connection with Old Spanish Days, where she was once La Presidenta.

Joanne's proudest achievements reflect her commitment to public service, notably her work supporting first responders and organizing the annual "Fun With the Force" event, which raises significant funds for law enforcement. Each holiday season, she and her family bring warmth and gratitude by sharing Christmas dinner with local firefighters and their families. Recognized multiple times as one of the Pacific Coast Business Times' "Top 50 Women in Business," Joanne embodies community spirit and leadership, continuously enriching Goleta and the South Coast through her passion and dedication.

### **Emerging Non-Profit of the Year - Hearts Aligned**

*Presented by Lure Digital*

Founded just three years ago, Hearts Aligned has swiftly become a symbol of hope for families in Goleta and beyond, providing essential support for low-income families with critically ill children. The organization began as a grassroots effort in the home of Vivian Solodkin, Founder, and has since grown, thanks to the commitment of its board, staff, and volunteers. Based in Goleta, Hearts Aligned has already assisted over 125 families, symbolizing the community's spirit of generosity and compassion.

Vivian's motivation stems from a deeply personal experience with her own child, inspiring her to make a tangible difference in the lives of others facing similar challenges. Hearts Aligned's impact is felt through initiatives like its annual Hearts to Hearts Valentine's Luncheon, which brings the community together to celebrate the courage of these families. Being recognized as the 2024 Emerging Non-Profit of the Year, Hearts Aligned is ready to expand its services and continue providing invaluable support to families in need.

## **Volunteer of the Year – Javier Quezada**

*Presented by ExxonMobil*

Javier Quezada's dedication to community service has made him an outstanding contributor to the Goleta area. His volunteer efforts span numerous local organizations, reflecting a commitment to uplifting the area that raised him. Javier served on the committee for the Goleta Lemon Festival for over 10 years and serves on the boards of the United Boys & Girls Club of Santa Barbara County, the Page Youth Center, the San Marcos High School Royal Pride Foundation, and the Dental Care Foundation for Santa Barbara and Ventura counties. His contributions extend to the Rotary and Lions Clubs of Goleta, United Way, Alzheimer's and Heart Associations, and financial literacy programs for local school districts. Through his work with youth sports and various nonprofits, Javier consistently strives to make the community a better place for all.

Professionally, Javier is a seasoned banker with over 22 years of experience, known for his welcoming presence at local high school and college sports events. Raised in Santa Barbara, he attended McKinley Elementary, La Cumbre Junior High, and San Marcos High School before pursuing higher education at SBCC and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. Javier's pride in his hometown fuels his passion to give back, setting a powerful example for future generations by creating a positive impact in Goleta and on the South Coast.

## **Education Impact Award – Chancellor Henry T. Yang and Dilling Yang**

*Presented by The Ritz-Carlton Bacara*

Chancellor Henry T. Yang and his wife, Dilling Yang, have made significant contributions to the Goleta community through their extensive service and leadership. Since 1994, Chancellor Yang has led UC Santa Barbara, elevating its stature to one of the nation's top public universities. Under his leadership, UC Santa Barbara has attracted an impressive faculty, contributing to the university being recognized world-wide for its materials science and engineering programs. During his tenure, UC Santa Barbara's renowned faculty has included six Nobel Prize Laureates.

Beyond administration, Chancellor Yang has remained dedicated to teaching, guiding numerous Ph.D. students, and authoring over 190 scientific articles. Yang has served on many scientific advisory boards including the National Academy of Engineering. This year, he will step down as Chancellor to focus on teaching and research.

Dilling Yang has been an active volunteer at UCSB, notably establishing the Dilling Yang Staff Scholarship to support staff career advancement. Together, the Yangs have engaged with the Goleta community through initiatives like the Chancellor's Regional Receptions, promoting diversity and excellence in student recruitment.

The faculty and technology fostered at the university has contributed to over ninety successful startup companies being founded in our community. The talent and research at the University has made Goleta the infrared capital of the world, and a leader in materials science.

Their combined efforts have significantly enhanced educational opportunities, the economic impact of the university, and community engagement on the South Coast.

### **Student of the Year – Ilan Abramov**

*Presented by UCLA Health*

Ilan Abramov, a senior at San Marcos High School, has distinguished himself as a compassionate leader and advocate for global humanitarian aid. As co-captain of the Youth for Direct Relief Club, Ilan has played a pivotal role in organizing fundraisers that have collectively raised over \$20,000 to support communities affected by crises around the world. His dedication is deeply personal—originally from Ukraine, Ilan channels his commitment to helping others, particularly those impacted by the war in his native country.

A graduate and board member of the San Marcos Entrepreneurship Academy (SMEA), Ilan has fostered financial literacy among local youth by founding the Money Mentors Club and has even designed a dietary-inclusive baking kit business plan that earned accolades in regional competitions. Additionally, through the AAPLE Academy, he volunteers as a Senior Tech Tutor, assisting seniors in navigating technology.

Ilan’s achievements embody resilience, leadership, and a strong commitment to his community and heritage. His recognition as Goleta’s Student of the Year celebrates his exceptional contributions and the inspiration he brings to peers and community members alike.

### **Civic Leader of the Year - Kelly Hoover**

*Presented by Community West Bank*

Kelly Hoover, honored as the Civic Leader of the Year, has significantly enhanced community engagement and trust in Goleta through her role as Community Relations Manager for the City of Goleta. With a background in journalism and public information, including years as a reporter and Public Information Officer for the Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Office, Kelly’s dedication to effective communication has shaped Goleta’s outreach efforts.

Since joining the City of Goleta, Kelly has championed numerous community-focused initiatives, such as Make Goleta Count, Go Green Goleta, and Good Land Good Shopping. Her team’s commitment to accessible information has led to increased social media engagement, a monthly newsletter, and over 250 annual press releases, creating an informed and connected community. Her work earned Goleta the 2024 Helen Putnam Award for Excellence for the LEAD Goleta Bilingual Community Academy and a STAR Award for her “Good Times in the Good Land” video.

Beyond her professional role, Kelly volunteers extensively in local schools and organizations, reflecting her “Grow Where You Are Planted” philosophy. Her impactful leadership continues to foster civic pride and transparency, making her an invaluable asset to the Goleta community.

## **Non-Profit Leader of the Year - Rachael Steidl**

*Presented by Sable Offshore*

Rachael Steidl, founder of YouthWell, is recognized as the Non-Profit Leader of the Year for her transformative contributions to mental health support in Santa Barbara County. Driven by her experiences as a parent, Rachael launched YouthWell in 2016 to address critical gaps in youth mental health services, emphasizing early intervention and prevention. Her passion for helping families has shaped YouthWell into a vital resource, where her leadership fosters a culture of compassion, connection, and accessibility.

Rachael's commitment to community support began with ParentClick, a resource network she founded in 2002 to help parents navigate local services. Her work with numerous local organizations, including the Scholarship Foundation of Santa Barbara, and Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation, reflects her dedication to strengthening community bonds and uplifting youth and families.

Honored previously with the Santa Barbara Independent's Local Heroes Award and the Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation's Heart of Gold Award, Rachael's leadership at YouthWell has created a lasting impact, giving youth and families on the South Coast a voice and access to essential support.

## **Goleta Preservation Award - Robert Zaida and Gregg Wilson**

*Presented by Montecito Bank & Trust*

Robert Zaida and Gregg Wilson are celebrated as this year's recipients of the Goleta Preservation Award for their longstanding commitment to preserving Goleta's heritage and natural beauty.

The two of them spent the last year rebuilding the historic blacksmith shop in the ranch yard at Rancho La Patera & Stow House, a project inspired by their dear friend, Tom Carron, who recently passed away from ALS. The three of them worked on the revitalization together, and Rob and Gregg completed the project in his honor this year.

Robert Zaida, a Goleta resident since childhood, has quietly made a lasting impact on the area through volunteer efforts, from Coastal Clean-ups to monthly neighborhood beautification projects. Known for his humble dedication, Robert's pride lies in simple acts that enhance Goleta's charm, like maintaining clean beaches and supporting local events. His dedication to Stow House reflects a personal passion for community service inspired by family and neighborhood role models.

Gregg Wilson, a retired UCSB swimming coach and community volunteer, has dedicated himself to educational preservation efforts at Stow House, where he engages local third graders with hands-on history lessons. His commitment to Goleta's legacy is inspired by a life lived in close connection to the community, contributing alongside his family to Stow House projects and other community initiatives.

Together, Robert and Gregg exemplify the spirit of preservation that sustains Goleta's unique history and environment for future generations.

We invite you to join us for this inspiring evening honoring Goleta's Finest. Tickets are available for \$175 per person, with advance purchase required at [SBSCChamber.com](https://www.sbscchamber.com). For event inquiries, please contact Chelsea Weininger, Events Manager at [Chelsea@sbscchamber.com](mailto:Chelsea@sbscchamber.com)

The 2024 Goleta's Finest Community Awards Gala is proudly presented by the Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce.

**Thank You to our Presenting Sponsors:** American Riviera Bank, Community West Bank, ExxonMobil, Fauver Large Archbald & Spray LLP, Lure Digital, Montecito Bank & Trust, The Ritz-Carlton Bacara, Sable Offshore, and UCLA Health.

We also extend our gratitude to our Silver Sponsors: Atlantic Aviation, Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, Chevron, Courtyard by Marriott Santa Barbara Goleta, Edhat, Google, MarBorg Industries, Nicholson & Schwartz, Noozhawk, Residence Inn by Marriott Santa Barbara Goleta, Sansum Clinic, now part of Sutter Health, Santa Barbara Airport, Scale Microgrid Solutions, SEE International, Signature Aviation, Solomon Hills, Southwest Airlines, Teledyne FLIR, TEAM Solutions Group, The Towbes Group, UC Santa Barbara, Village Properties, and Workzones.

**Sponsorship Opportunities** are still available. For inquiries, please contact Michele Schneider, Director of Business Development, at [Michele@sbscchamber.com](mailto:Michele@sbscchamber.com) or (805) 965-3023.

*About Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce*

The Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce, from Goleta to Carpinteria, is a regional business organization with the mission to help South Coast businesses, residents, and visitors thrive. Through leadership and collaboration, the Chamber is the principal economic development entity advocating for the business community. We engage with businesses, elected officials, and regional partners in proactive business initiatives that foster the South Coast's unique business environment and create opportunities for our communities. The Chamber is proud to represent local business members who create 75,000 jobs on the South Coast! To learn more, visit [sbscchamber.com](https://www.sbscchamber.com) or follow @SBSouthCoastChamber on Facebook and Instagram, and @SBSCChamber on Twitter.

###