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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce  
Hosts 2025 Regional Business Awards Gala**

The Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce, from Goleta to Carpinteria, is pleased to announce the recipients of the 2025 Regional Business Awards who will be celebrated during the Annual Membership Meeting and Regional Business Awards Gala on Friday, February 21, 2025 at the Hilton Santa Barbara Beachfront Resort. The evening will honor outstanding businesses and individuals who have made significant contributions to the economic vitality and community well-being on the South Coast.

Kristen Miller, President & CEO of the Chamber, expressed her excitement: "This event celebrates the strength, innovation, and resilience of our entire community. These businesses, organizations, and leaders exemplify the best of the South Coast, and their stories inspire us all to continue building a thriving and vibrant region together."

An evening of elegance and celebration, the gala will commence with the Chamber's annual membership meeting, featuring the formal installation of the 2025 Chair of the Board - Randy Berg, the 2025 Executive Officers, and Board Members, as well as a tribute to outgoing Board Members for their invaluable service. The highlight of the evening will be the presentation of the Regional Business Awards, showcasing the achievements and impact of businesses and leaders across the region.

Join us in this celebration of business excellence and community spirit. The 2025 Regional Business Awards Winners are:

**Large Business of the Year -**

**Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck** exemplifies corporate social responsibility through its extensive philanthropic efforts. With a history of giving back spanning over 56 years, the firm has embedded community engagement into its culture. In 2023, the Santa Barbara office contributed over 700 pro bono hours—valued at more than \$319,000—supported local initiatives like DignityMoves, and completed 11 impactful Karma Projects, including beach cleanups, clothing drives, and green space enhancements at Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara.

Their innovative Karma Bucks program incentivizes employee volunteerism, empowering staff to support causes they care about. This initiative, along with their expectation that all attorneys contribute pro bono work, highlights the firm's dedication to fostering meaningful contributions both within and outside the workplace.

Brownstein's partnership with DignityMoves underscores its commitment to addressing homelessness. In 2023, the firm provided legal services for Hope Village in Santa Maria and La Posada in Santa Barbara and adopted and decorated rooms to welcome residents. These efforts, coupled with employee-driven contributions like assembling Dignity Bags for unsheltered individuals, reflect the firm's hands-on approach to philanthropy.

The firm's culture of service, mentorship for young legal professionals, and dedication to improving the Santa Barbara community set it apart as a model of corporate excellence and civic responsibility.

#### **Small Business of the Year -**

**Events by Rincon** has been a cornerstone of the community for 40 years, offering exceptional hospitality and creating unforgettable celebrations from its Carpinteria location. The venue's exquisite indoor and outdoor spaces provide a welcoming gathering place for the Carpinteria community and a premier destination for celebrations that draw guests from around the world. Founded in 1984 by Marc and Carol Borowitz as Brandon's Restaurant, the business has grown into a trusted name in catering and event services, renowned for its creativity, professionalism, and personal touch.

Beyond crafting memorable experiences, Events by Rincon is deeply committed to the community it serves. Through partnerships with local nonprofits, sponsorships of community events, and steadfast support for countless fundraisers, they exemplify generosity and connection. Their dedication to hospitality, employee welfare, and community engagement has enabled them to overcome challenges ranging from economic downturns to natural disasters and the COVID-19 crisis.

In 2023, the Carpinteria-based business transitioned ownership to longtime team members Alyssa Searcy and Jonathon Sotelo, ensuring that Rincon's legacy of quality and care continues for decades to come. Along with Senior Manager Aly Cokeley, Marc and Carol remain actively involved, providing operational and financial guidance.

Events by Rincon's commitment to providing customized, high-quality events and its steady support for the local community reflect its enduring role as a pillar of excellence and resilience on the South Coast.

#### **Milestone Business Award -**

**Montecito Bank & Trust** is celebrating 50 years of dedicated service to the Central Coast, setting the gold standard for community-focused banking. Since its founding in 1975, the bank has continuously prioritized giving back, with a mission to make its communities better places to live and work.

Through its hallmark Community Dividends program, Montecito Bank & Trust has granted millions to local nonprofits, including \$1 million in 2024 alone, supporting vital causes in arts, health, education, and social services. The bank also empowers employees to volunteer extensively, dedicating over 7,900 hours annually to nonprofit boards, fundraising, financial literacy education, and community service projects.

Notable initiatives include partnerships with DignityMoves to combat homelessness, the Housing Authority of Santa Barbara to teach financial literacy to underserved youth, and Peoples' Self-Help Housing to expand affordable housing. The Michael Towbes Community Impact Dividend further extends their reach, awarding \$100,000 annually to nonprofits addressing critical community needs.

With a deep culture of philanthropy and innovation, Montecito Bank & Trust continues to uphold the vision of its founder, Michael Towbes, fostering collaboration and progress. For five decades of commitment to the region's prosperity, the bank truly embodies its motto: *behind every great community is a great bank*.

#### **Non-Profit of the Year -**

**Storyteller Children's Center** fosters resilience for the region's most vulnerable families. Operating year-round from three campuses, Storyteller provides trauma-informed early childhood education and essential social services for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers, offering a solid foundation for lifelong success.

The organization ensures that children in their care receive more than an education—they gain access to nutrition, therapeutic resources, and social-emotional development. These services empower young learners to enter kindergarten prepared and ready to thrive, fostering socialization skills and resiliency that contribute to their development into healthy, productive adults.

Beyond the classroom, Storyteller is committed to supporting the entire family. By providing food, safety, and critical social services, they enable parents to pursue education or employment without the burden of childcare concerns. This comprehensive approach not only stabilizes families but also promotes long-term community growth and well-being.

Through its innovative programs and commitment to social change, Storyteller Children's Center plays a pivotal role in breaking the cycle of poverty. Its comprehensive approach has made it an indispensable asset to Santa Barbara County, ensuring that even the youngest and most at-risk members of the community have the resources and support they need to succeed.

#### **Hospitality Business of the Year -**

**The Ritz-Carlton Bacara** has been a symbol of luxury, hospitality, and community along our picturesque coastline for 25 years. Originally opened in 2000, the resort has consistently offered world-class experiences, blending Mediterranean-inspired elegance with the elevated service of The Ritz-Carlton brand, which took stewardship of the property in 2017.

Employing 800 residents, the resort cultivates a strong culture of excellence guided by The Ritz-Carlton Credo, ensuring memorable experiences for its guests, and fostering a commitment to the broader community. Through its Community Footprints program, The Ritz-Carlton Bacara actively supports local charities and children's programs, extending its influence beyond its luxurious setting to uplift those in need.

The resort honors Santa Barbara's rich history, celebrating the Chumash people and historic Californios through thoughtfully designed spaces, art installations, and exhibits that reflect the area's indigenous roots and Spanish heritage. A nearly \$50 million re-imagination project is currently underway to enhance the guest experience while preserving the resort's iconic charm.

Recognized with numerous accolades, including Best Resort Spa by the *Santa Barbara Independent* and #5 Resort in Southern California by *Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards*, The Ritz-Carlton Bacara illustrates a commitment to excellence, sustainability, and cultural heritage. This dedication, coupled with its significant contributions to the local economy and community, cements its place as a leader in hospitality on the American Riviera.

#### **Community Impact Award -**

**Santa Barbara Airport** has been a cornerstone of the region since its founding in 1932, serving as a vital transportation hub and a key driver of local economic growth. With over 1.4 million passengers in 2024, the Santa Barbara Airport achieved another record-breaking year, supporting local businesses, tourism, and residents with exceptional connectivity and convenience.

The airport's impact extends far beyond air travel. Through strategic partnerships and innovative programs, the airport prioritizes inclusivity and community engagement. Notable initiatives include hosting Girls in Aviation Day with local Girl Scouts, Alpha Resource Center, and Alaska Airlines, as well as launching programs like the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program and therapy dog services to enhance the passenger experience. Santa Barbara Airport's Plane Pull Fundraiser and inaugural Disability Awareness Event exemplify its dedication to fostering a sense of community and inclusivity.

The airport also invests in the region's future with sustainable infrastructure improvements and the Terminal Improvement Project, set to break ground in 2026. Last year, Santa Barbara Airport introduced local favorites, Santa Barbara Roasting Company and Silvergreens, to its concessions, connecting travelers with the region's unique offerings.

As the gateway to the South Coast, the airport not only provides critical connectivity but also embodies the values and character of Santa Barbara, making it a vital and cherished community asset. Its ongoing

commitment to growth, accessibility, and sustainability ensures it will continue to thrive as a hub of opportunity and progress for generations to come.

#### **Historical Preservation Award -**

The **Santa Barbara Historical Museum**, founded in 1932, stands as one of the city's oldest and most significant cultural institutions. Established by visionary civic leaders concerned about preserving local artifacts, the Museum has become the guardian of Santa Barbara's rich cultural heritage, housing the area's most comprehensive archival collection of documents, artifacts, and artwork. Its collection, representing the native Chumash, Spanish, Mexican, and American periods, includes over 100,000 fine art pieces and historical artifacts, as well as 100,000 research documents, maps, and photographs.

In 2024, the Museum achieved a landmark milestone with the acquisition of the Santa Barbara News-Press archives, a monumental collection chronicling 150 years of local history. This vast archive of photographs, negatives, microfilm, and clippings was acquired through community fundraising and is being meticulously preserved through a new internship program focusing on inventory and digitization. The collection will enrich future exhibitions and be made available to researchers through the Gledhill Research Library.

The Museum also plays a vital role in community engagement through exhibitions, free admission, educational programs, and cultural events. With partnerships across schools, nonprofits, and businesses, the Museum hosts 35+ annual events, from history talks to Fiesta-themed celebrations, as well as over private events that support local vendors.

As the steward of iconic landmarks like the Covarrubias Adobe, the Museum continues to inspire meaningful connections to Santa Barbara's history, ensuring its vibrant legacy is preserved for generations to come.

#### **Visionary Arts Leadership Award -**

**Celesta M. Billeci, the Miller McCune Executive Director of UCSB Arts & Lectures**, is being honored with the Visionary Arts Leadership Award for her transformative impact on the cultural landscape of Santa Barbara. Over her 25-year tenure, Billeci expanded the organization's operations tenfold, elevating it to national prominence.

Under her leadership, UCSB Arts & Lectures became a coveted destination for world-renowned artists and thinkers, hosting luminaries such as Yo-Yo Ma, Wynton Marsalis, and Nobel laureates like Malala Yousafzai. Billeci's commitment to diversity and accessibility is exemplified by initiatives like ¡Viva el Arte de Santa Bárbara!, launched in 2006 to share Latin American cultural heritage through free performances and workshops.

Her visionary programming brought international dance companies, including Cloud Gate Dance Theater of Taiwan and Batsheva Dance Company, to Santa Barbara, enriching the community's cultural fabric. Billeci's dedication to educational outreach connected thousands of students with artists and thought leaders, fostering a vibrant arts education network.

As she prepares to retire at the end of the season, Billeci's legacy of leadership and innovation continues to inspire, leaving a lasting mark on the arts community and setting a high standard for cultural programming and engagement in the future.

Tickets to attend the Regional Business Awards Gala are \$175 per person, \$1,400 for a table of 8, or \$1,750 for a table of 10. Tickets must be purchased in advance and are available at [SBSCCChamber.com](https://www.sbscchamber.com). The Gala will be held on Friday, February 21, 2025 from 6 to 9 PM at the Hilton Santa Barbara Beachfront Resort. For questions about the event, please contact Chelsea Weininger, Events Manager at [Chelsea@sbscchamber.com](mailto:Chelsea@sbscchamber.com).

The Regional Business Awards Gala is presented by the Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce, from Goleta to Carpinteria. For sponsorship information, please contact Michele at (805) 965-3023 or [Michele@SBSCChamber.com](mailto:Michele@SBSCChamber.com).

**Many thanks to our Sponsors:**

*Presenting Sponsors:* Brownstein Hyatt Farber Schreck, ExxonMobil, Hilton Santa Barbara Beachfront Resort, Montecito Bank & Trust, Sable Offshore, UCLA Health, Village Properties.

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*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](http://sbscchamber.com).

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