

LA
JOLLA
PLAY
HOUSE



MILITARY AND VETERAN PROGRAMS

The MVP Initiative
Impact Report
2022/2023 Season

LA JOLLA PLAYHOUSE

MISSION & VALUES

MISSION STATEMENT

La Jolla Playhouse advances theatre as an art form, telling stories that inspire empathy and create a dialogue toward a more just future. With our intrepid spirit and eclectic, artist-driven approach we will continue to cultivate a local, national and global following with an insatiable appetite for audacious work. We provide unfettered creative opportunities for a community of artists of all backgrounds and abilities. We are committed to being a permanent safe harbor for unsafe and surprising work, offering a glimpse of the new and the next in American theatre.

VALUES STATEMENT

At La Jolla Playhouse, we believe that stories enhance the human experience, instill empathy and help us see the world in new ways. We respect all races, ethnicities, cultures, physical/cognitive abilities, ages, genders and identities, and endeavor to be an anti-racist and accessible organization that removes barriers to engagement. As a community of life-long learners who celebrate the spirit of play, we innovate and collaborate to bring theatre to life. We practice empathy by listening, challenging our assumptions and staying open to all perspectives. We respect and recognize the complexities of all lived experiences, identities and cultural backgrounds. We honor the Kumeyaay Nation, the original caretakers of the land on which our theaters sit. We will fight against anti-blackness, the many forms of racism directed at BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and all types of discrimination and harassment, to be a more inclusive space where everyone feels welcome onstage and off. We work with our community to identify, understand and address ways to make our theatre more equitable and accessible. We infuse the spirit of play into everything we do, sparking creativity, fun and life-long learning. We innovate and take risks to propel theatre as an art form and as a pathway toward fostering belonging and enhancing human connection. We collaborate by prioritizing inclusive practices from which diverse voices, talents and ideas can strengthen engagement and creative thinking. We vow to grow and embrace these values. When we falter, we will hold ourselves accountable through transparent communication, measurable outcomes, self-reflection and humility. With great joy and a strong sense of responsibility, we commit to these values in every aspect of our work

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR OF ARTS ENGAGEMENT..... 4

MILITARY AND VETERAN PROGRAMS (MVP INITIATIVE) OVERVIEW.....5

BENEFITS OF THEATRE & ARTS FOR MILITARY COMMUNITY.....6

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS & SUPPORTERS.....7

YOUR IMPACT.....8

VETERANS PLAYWRITING WORKSHOP (VPW).....10

VPW SPOTLIGHT: Scooter Davis.....12

MILITARY NIGHTS OUT.....13

COMPLIMENTARY TICKETS FOR MILITARY COMMUNITY.....13

MILITARY FAMILIES AT WOW.....14

VOICES OF OUR CITY CHOIR THEATRE WORKSHOPS.....16

KEY PERSONNEL.....17

TEACHING ARTIST SPOTLIGHTS.....17

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: VetTix.....18

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: VetArt.....19

COMING NEXT SEASON.....20

A MESSAGE FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF ARTS ENGAGEMENT



La Jolla Playhouse is dedicated to supporting our local active-duty servicemembers, veterans, and their families through our Military and Veterans Programs — the MVP Initiative. We are grateful to all of our partners who have joined us in this mission.

As the daughter of a Purple Heart recipient and combat veteran of the Vietnam War, I am particularly honored to lead the Playhouse's efforts to give back to the military community of San Diego through creative enrichment and therapeutic opportunities.

Our Military and Veteran Programs, including Military Nights Out, Military Families at WOW, Veterans Playwriting Workshop, and our POP Tour for Young Audiences and Military Families, have made a profound and lasting impact on the community and at the Playhouse.

Thanks to your generosity, we were able to continue and expand these programs this season, providing more opportunities for military families to bond and reconnect over their shared love of the theatre. One military spouse shared that attending one of our events helped make up for lost time with her loved one, creating new memories to cherish together.

We are especially proud of our Veterans Playwriting Workshop, which helps veterans find their voice and gain confidence in their ability to create. One veteran reflected, "Being in a community of like-minded people was very encouraging. The [instructors] that led the workshop were a delight to work with, and their sharing was very helpful in developing a new script. I also met some really talented people that I hope to engage with again."

We are excited to continue these programs and expand our reach to even more participants in the 2023/24 Season. We are deeply grateful for your shared passion for establishing theatre as a creative and restorative place for the military community. Thank you for your support.

With gratitude,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jacole Kitchen'.

Jacole Kitchen
Director of Arts Engagement

MILITARY AND VETERAN PROGRAMS (THE MVP INITIATIVE) OVERVIEW

The military community plays an important role in the San Diego community and La Jolla Playhouse has created dedicated, free-of-charge programs to enhance the quality of life for veterans, active-duty servicemembers, and their families. The Playhouse's MVP Initiative connects, inspires, and entertains through programs like the Veterans Playwriting Workshop (VPW), Military Nights Out, Military Families at WOW, arts learning programs targeted to children in military families, and military-themed artistic programming. These experiences allow members of the military community to find meaningful avenues of self-expression and to spend quality time with loved ones through enriching arts activities, without the barriers of cost and limited finances.

SAN DIEGO MILITARY PRESENCE

On a per capita basis, San Diego County has the most active-duty and veteran military personnel in the country. There are more than 142,000 active-duty military servicemembers (2020 USO San Diego), more than 23,000 national guard/reserves members (2020 USO San Diego), and about 250,000 veterans residing in San Diego (SDMAC Military Impact Study). This region's active-duty military personnel serve at the Marine Corps Air Station Miramar, Marine Corps Base & Air Station Camp Pendleton, and the Naval Bases at Point Loma, Coronado, and San Diego.



BENEFITS OF THEATRE & ARTS FOR MILITARY COMMUNITY

In acknowledgement of this population's significant need for support and services, La Jolla Playhouse has been proactively working with San Diego's military community since 2015. Research consistently shows the benefits of theatre and other arts on active-duty military servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

In 2011, Americans for the Arts reported on conversations about whether the arts and creative arts therapies aid the recovery and reintegration of servicemembers returning from combat with a focus on those injured during service. The discussions that followed concluded that arts are an effective tool in the healing process of military personnel, their families, and caregivers. According to Atkins, et al. in *Arts, Health, and Well-Being Across the Military Continuum: White Paper 2.0 and Beyond*, findings showed that engaging with the arts reduces the experience of pain, the impact of PTSD, and other trauma-related injuries while strengthening the relationship between the servicemember and their family or caregiver. Additionally, the arts provide alternative methods for servicemembers to tell their stories and safely confront challenges faced while serving. Through our Military and Veteran Programs, the Playhouse is actively expanding the military community's access to and participation in the arts.

In the same report, a key practice recommendation included "[incorporating] family-centered arts programming at all stages of military service and beyond." Family-centered arts programming is key to our military programs, in particular Military Families at WOW and Military Nights Out. These programs focus on reconnecting with loved ones, building community, and actively fostering social connection.

The 2020 virtual summit, Arts & Health Across the Military, highlighted the importance of, "Social connection and the combating of social isolation," which became especially clear through the pandemic (Atkins et al.). This finding enforced a key takeaway from the summit that, "healing happens as a community." Our Military and Veteran Programs centers around social connection and collaboration, providing safe spaces for servicemembers to connect and create meaningful relationships.

Participating in theatre is proven to be an effective treatment for those recovering from PTSD and other trauma-related injuries while strengthening the relationships between servicemembers and their families. In *The Body Keeps the Score*, Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk explains, "Traumatized people are terrified to feel deeply. They are afraid to experience their emotions, because emotions lead to loss of control. In contrast, theater is about embodying emotions, giving voice to them, becoming rhythmically engaged, taking on and embodying different roles. . . . Theater gives trauma survivors a chance to connect with one another by deeply experiencing their common humanity." As VPW alumna Shairi Engle shared, "the Veterans Playwriting Workshop saved my life. While I went through a PTSD treatment program at the VA Hospital, I was also attending the writing workshop. It always struck me that the exit sign for the hospital off the I-5 also pointed to La Jolla Playhouse, which is where the real therapy took place."

THANK YOU TO OUR 2022/2023 SUPPORTERS

Your invaluable support enabled us to subsidize the expenses associated with tickets, workshops, arts education, and engagement programs specifically designed for military families. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who supported this cause. Your unwavering generosity and commitment to preserving the arts is truly cherished and deeply appreciated.

Ellen Browning Scripps Foundation Teresa and Byron Pollitt



AND ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FROM:

Anonymous
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Maureen Arrigo
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Jennifer and Chris Wahl

YOUR IMPACT

Throughout the 2022/2023 Season, the dedicated Playhouse donors and sponsors who generously contributed to our Military and Veteran Programs helped us serve more than 2,000 servicemembers and their family members.

TESTIMONIALS

"Thanks to La Jolla Playhouse for the Military Night Out! We appreciate your ongoing support of the military community, and we enjoyed the dinner and the show!"

US Navy Veteran



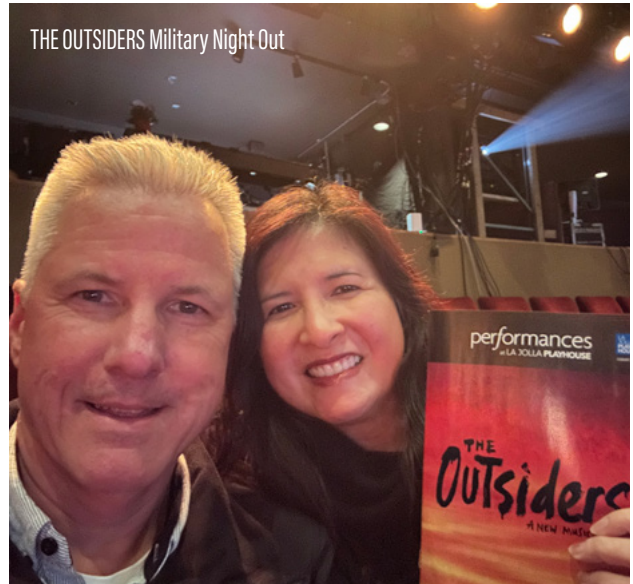
"Thank you for such a quality event, we would never had known this type of production could be made possible for us. Thank you, thank you, thank you. What an incredible experience!"

US Army Veteran



"I really appreciated the community. I loved that we all shared the common bonds of playwriting and military service. It's a wonderful, open, welcoming, collaborative environment, nurtured by everyone from the instructors down. I looked forward to attending every week."

VPW Participant



VETERANS PLAYWRITING WORKSHOP

The Veterans Playwriting Workshop (VPW) offers a transformative experience for participants, as they collaborate with teaching artists who are veterans themselves over several weeks to shape and share their stories, fostering a sense of community and healing throughout the process. The program consists of three distinct levels, Beginner, Intermediate, and Development, and participants are welcome to take these sections as many times as desired.

VPW is an inclusive program provided free of charge to participants, including veterans, active-duty military personnel, spouses, and national interpreters. We recruit participants through our partnerships with military organizations, Military Nights Out, and local VA referrals. Since the end of the pandemic closure, we have successfully transitioned to a hybrid model, offering the Workshop both in-person and online via Zoom. This approach has granted greater flexibility and accessibility to participants, enabling the involvement of individuals from various locations and with different needs.

23 individuals participated in Veterans Playwriting Workshop over three sessions during the 2022/23 Season.

- July 6 – August 24, 2022: Intermediate Level
- November 30, 2022 – February 1, 2023: Beginner Level
- March 22 – May 10, 2023: Intermediate Level



VPW TESTIMONIALS

"The roundtable workshop of the last three sessions when we all had something down on paper to read and discuss were by far the best. I was very impressed with everyone's talent and enthusiasm."

"The dynamic of group feedback and sharing ideas and perspectives was invaluable. The cherry on top was the actors reading the plays. It added another layer of feedback that was very helpful."

"I really appreciated the community. I loved that we all shared the common bonds of playwriting and military service. It's a wonderful, open, welcoming, collaborative environment, nurtured by everyone from the instructors down. I looked forward to attending every week."

"Thank you for offering the virtual opportunity for me to attend from out of town. I felt that the instructor made the virtual attendees feel just as much of the process as the in-person attendees. This was a very positive experience."

VPW SPOTLIGHT

Daryl “Scooter” Davis



Daryl “Scooter” Davis at VPW Reading

Daryl “Scooter” Davis is a Navy veteran and a La Jolla Playhouse employee who started participating in VPW in 2021. Now in his fourth VPW session, Scooter was recently invited to participate in the Old Globe Theatre’s annual Powers New Voices Festival, where they produced his play, *If These Walls Could Talk, and the Floor, and the Ceiling*.

“It’s amazing. I love it. This place has expanded my view of theatre and increased my love for it,” Scooter said of La Jolla Playhouse and the VPW program.

“As far as having my play professionally produced [at the Powers New Voices festival at the Old Globe]—it bolstered my confidence. It was like the door opening. This was my validation that I can do this on a professional level in a space where it can be appreciated. That was the biggest thing—just to get the opportunity. When it comes to doing anything in the arts there is always a barrier, whether it’s a location, who you know, or a process. VPW has eliminated the barrier of the process. . . . I will keep going to VPW because the repetitive nature of the program is honing my discipline. I’m writing with other people at my level and get to bounce ideas with them.

“Gill Sotu [VPW’s instructor]—the dude, I’ve watched him effortlessly flip from facilitator to dramaturg, to inspirational, to mentor. He changes hats so fast because we’re all in different spaces. And he does that for everybody. The best thing that he says is, ‘check your own dopeness meter.’ In this world of creation, they are going to get torn apart and there are people who will say that you should do it this way or that way. But sometimes you have to check your own dopeness meter. It’s about knowing when to take advice, when to apply the criticism, and when to trust in yourself and be brave and true to your own self.”

MILITARY NIGHTS OUT

With a preshow reception and complimentary tickets to a Playhouse performance, Military Nights Out create magical moments of reconnection for military members and their families. Together, loved ones create new memories, helping to make up for some of the holidays and celebrations they have missed over the years. With in-kind support from the Gary Sinise Foundation, the Playhouse was able to provide enhanced meal options and important resources for attendees.

In a recent collaboration, the Playhouse partnered with Veterans Art Project (VetArt) to host artist booths during the preshow reception of *As You Like It* where veteran artists displayed and sold their art. There was also a booth to write letters to patients in the local VA Hospital.

- 102 tickets offered to *Lempicka* on June 17, 2022
- 80 tickets offered to *Here There Are Blueberries* on August 5, 2022
- 53 tickets offered to *Fandango for Butterflies (and Coyotes)* on September 18, 2022
- 93 tickets offered to *Kristina Wong, Sweatshop Overlord* on September 30, 2022
- 57 tickets offered to *As You Like It* on December 2, 2022
- 100 tickets offered to *The Outsiders* on February 24, 2023

Through partners and direct outreach, the Playhouse served 485 active-duty servicemembers, veterans, and family members during six Military Nights Out this season.

COMPLIMENTARY TICKETS FOR MILITARY COMMUNITY

La Jolla Playhouse reaches out to our friends and partners at military- and veteran-serving organizations and institutions to offer complimentary tickets to their members for performances in our Subscription Season. These tickets are in addition to the complimentary tickets offered for Military Nights Out.

- 564 complimentary tickets to *Lempicka*
- 80 complimentary tickets to *Here There Are Blueberries*
- 83 complimentary tickets to *Fandango for Butterflies (and Coyotes)*
- 93 complimentary tickets to *Kristina Wong, Sweatshop Overlord*
- 14 complimentary tickets to *As You Like It*
- 97 complimentary tickets to *The Outsiders*

The Playhouse provided 931 additional complimentary tickets to military families overall this season.

MILITARY FAMILIES AT WOW

In recognition and appreciation of the San Diego military community, our 2023 Without Walls (WOW) Festival at the Rady Shell at Jacobs Park hosted two Military Appreciation Mixers in collaboration with Veterans' Community Connections. Attendees were able to enjoy snacks and drinks at our Military Appreciation Lounge. The WOW Festival featured family-friendly performances, including our POP Tour production of *Jin vs. the Beach*, dance, large scale puppets, music, acrobats and clowns, and immersive and interactive playscapes. Additionally, VetArt displayed paintings and sculptures by veterans and hosted a booth where WOW attendees could write letters to and draw pictures for patients at the local VA hospital.

Hundreds of WOW Festival attendees were affiliated with the military and a total of 80 active-duty servicemembers, veterans, and military family members attended the Military Appreciation Mixers.





POP TOUR FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES AND MILITARY FAMILIES

The Playhouse makes a dedicated effort to bring the annual Performance Outreach Program (POP) Tour to military families through performances on military bases, at the WOW Festival (where multiple POP Tour performances take place) and visits to schools that have large populations of military children. Each year's play highlights a real-life topic or timely issue for students to discuss. The 2023 POP Tour, *Jin vs. the Beach*, took place at multiple schools with 20%+ military families including **Dewey Elementary, Saburo Muraoka Elementary, Rio Seco Elementary, Boys & Girls Club Oceanside, Tierrasanta Elementary, Otay Elementary, as well as Hancock Elementary, a school situated within military housing where 98% of the students have active-duty military parents or guardians.** Additionally, the public performances were scheduled during the WOW Festival, ensuring that our Military Families at WOW could also enjoy performances.

VOICES OF OUR CITY CHOIR THEATRE WORKSHOPS

Voices of our City Choir plays a vital role in helping San Diego's unsheltered neighbors rediscover hope and a sense of possibility through the transformative power of music. By providing safe spaces, resources, a strong sense of community, and opportunities to develop work-readiness and advocacy skills, the choir offers individuals a place of belonging and a chance to rebuild their lives. As a key partner, La Jolla Playhouse proudly offers bi-monthly theatre workshops to Choir members, free of charge. These workshops are designed to nurture their storytelling abilities, enabling them to share their personal experiences through the medium of song.

Throughout this season, we hosted a series of 13 Voices of Our City Choir Theatre Workshops, each spanning three hours. These workshops garnered significant interest, attracting a total of 390 enthusiastic participants. **Four of the choir members are military veterans and one of the teaching artists for these workshops, Shairi Engle, is a veteran and alumna of our Veterans Playwriting Workshop.**



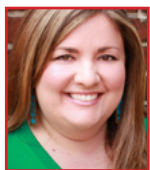
Teaching Artist, Shairi Engle (right) and CEO & Creative Director of Voices of Our City Choir, Steph Johnson (center) with Voices of Our City Choir participant

KEY PERSONNEL

LEARNING & ENGAGEMENT STAFF



Jacole Kitchen is the Director of Arts Engagement and In-House Casting at La Jolla Playhouse, spearheading numerous community-based programs and overseeing our Military and Veteran Programs. As the daughter of a Purple Heart recipient and combat veteran of the Vietnam War, Jacole is honored to be able to give back and serve the military community of San Diego through creative enrichment and therapeutic opportunities at the Playhouse. In addition, she teaches acting, improv and professional development for actors through UC San Diego Extended Studies. Directing credits include the Playhouse's Performance Outreach Program (POP) Tour productions of *Light Years Away*, *Pick Me Last*, and *Jin vs. the Beach*, as well as *Cardboard Piano* (Diversionary Theatre), *An Iliad* (New Village Arts), among others. She also serves as Executive Director of the San Diego Performing Arts League.



Bridget Cavaiola Stone is the Director of Learning at La Jolla Playhouse and co-leads a department that impacts more than 30,000 San Diegans each year with a team of more than 100 contracted staff and volunteers through K-12 programming, internships, and adult learning and engagement opportunities. She is the co-producer of the Performance Outreach Program (POP) Tour. She is a former high school English and theatre teacher, a teaching artist, and has extensive training in inclusion, professional learning, and arts integration.



Hannah Reinert is the Learning & Engagement Manager at La Jolla Playhouse. She supports all Learning & Engagement programming and leads the Playhouse Teen Council and helps guide the internship program. She holds a BA in Theatre & Communications from UC San Diego, Cum Laude, and is the winner of the 2017 UC San Diego Bronowski Award.

TEACHING ARTIST SPOTLIGHTS



Gill Sotu is the current instructor for Veterans Playwriting Workshop. A Navy veteran, poet, playwright, musician, DJ, and performing artist, Gill is a two-time Grand Slam Poetry Champion, two-time Raw Performing Artist of the Year, and a five-time TEDx San Diego presenter. Currently, he is a teaching artist and a commissioned playwright with the Old Globe and La Jolla Playhouse, a guest teaching artist with the San Diego School of Creative and Performing Arts and New Village Arts, and the official Poet-in-Residence for the San Diego Writer's Festival.



Shairi Engle is an Air Force veteran, teaching artist, and writer for stage, screen, and virtual reality (VR). Tony Kushner awarded her the 2019 Arts in the Armed Forces (AITAF) Bridge Award and she was a 2021 Stavis Playwriting Award nominee. Her work has been shared on the stages of The Public (NYC), La Jolla Playhouse, United States Air Force Academy, Sugarloaf Performing Arts Center, and the Old Globe's 2020 PRIDE CoLab. She's held residencies with New York Stage and Film, Veterans Artist Residencies, and the Writers Guild Foundation. Her VR projects with Moth+Flame have helped thousands of soldiers learn suicide and sexual assault prevention and first response skills, which was covered in the *New York Times* and was a finalist for the fifth International VR Awards in 2021. Currently, Shairi can be found working with Voices of Our City Choir both as a Special Projects Coordinator where she supports the development of robust arts programming for unsheltered San Diegans AND as a La Jolla Playhouse teaching artist and playwright.

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: VetTix



VetTix enriches the lives of our military and veterans by providing reintegration opportunities and family bonding experiences by providing free tickets to socially interactive events.

VetTix is one of our partners in providing complimentary tickets to the Military community. **During the 2022/23 Season, VetTix helped us distribute 719 tickets to five productions for some of the Military Nights Out and other performances.**



"A very moving play. The La Jolla Playhouse never fails to put on a first class production. With the Gary Sinise Foundation treating to a delightful dinner and company with other Veterans it was a very enjoyable evening."

Johnathon, US Marines Veteran

"Once again La Jolla Playhouse presented a new and terrific show! And the Gary Sinise Foundation treated us to a great dinner. The kindness of the two organizations always lead to a great family night out!!"

Sheldon, US Navy Veteran

"We totally enjoyed *Fandango for Butterflies (and Coyotes)*. Thank you for supporting us Veterans. Gary Sinise Foundation surprised us with lunch and drinks. We felt so special!"

Maria, US Navy Veteran

PARTNER SPOTLIGHT: VetArt

Veterans Art Project (VetArt)



- The Veterans Art Project (VetArt) is a community based arts organization serving the veteran community, active duty military members, their families and caregivers through process-driven deep arts engagement and art therapy. They provide a process-intensive arts encounter proven to help veterans and active duty (some with post-traumatic stress, TBI, and MST) find their voice and work through the life-changing process of transitioning from military to civilian life.
- Collaboration for *As You Like It* Military Night Out on December 2, 2022 – veteran artists brought their work to display and sell during the reception. They also provided an interactive letter writing station, where participants could write words of encouragement and thanks to veterans and active servicemembers at the local VA hospital.
- VetArt, through a partnership targeted towards further enriching the lives of veterans and veteran families through the arts, attended and participated in the WOW Festival. Their organization brought multiple artists to the festival to display their multimedia work, including bronze casting, fiber art and pottery. There was also a booth to write letters to patients in the local VA hospital.



La Jolla Playhouse staff with artists at VetArt Studio

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE 2023/24 SEASON

- June 6, 2023: *Love All* Military Night Out
- August 16 - October 4, 2023: Veterans Playwriting Workshop – Beginner Level
- July 21, 2023: *Is It Thursday Yet?* Military Night Out
- August 30, 2023: *The Untitled Unauthorized Hunter S. Thompson Musical* Military Night Out
- October 13, 2023: *SUMO* Military Night Out
- November 17, 2023: *Babbitt* Military Night Out
- February - March 2024: Veterans Playwriting Workshop – Beginner Level
- March - April 2024: Performance Outreach Program (POP) Tour
- February, 14 2024: *Redwood* Military Night Out
- April 2024: Military Families at WOW

To learn more about how you can support our Military and Veteran Programs, please contact Associate Director of Philanthropy, Keely Daximillion, at kdaximillion@ljp.org or (858) 228-3084.

For Corporate Support, please contact Becky Goodman, Assistant Director of Philanthropy, Institutional Giving, at rgoodman@ljp.org or (858) 228-3059.

