

SOCIETY

Return of the 21st Annual Blue Water Ball

BY [JOANNE A CALITRI](#) | MAY 16, 2023



SB Channelkeeper Team, from left: Ted Morton, Molly Troup, Penny Owens, Laura Sanchez, and Veronica Moran (photo by Joanne A Calitri)

After a four-year hiatus, the Santa Barbara Channelkeeper organization held its signature fundraiser, The Blue Water Ball, on May 7 at the Santa Barbara Cabrillo Pavilion Ballroom overlooking our beautiful ocean, coast, and view of the SB Channel Islands.



Ben Halpern and Ted Morton (photo by Joanne A Calitri)

The sold-out event of all things blue had guests in ocean-inspired attire. Dinner tables sported seafaring burlap tablecloths, hammered silverware, and rustic centerpieces. Guests received a box of truffles made by Jessica Foster Confections from the SB Company, and a cuddly fringed throw blanket with the SB Channelkeeper logo from the Riviera Towel Company. Four large-scale photographs of ocean life in Tahiti and Santa Barbara taken and donated by **Branden Aroyan** were displayed around the ballroom, with one auctioned off during dinner. Aroyan and his wife **Valerie** have worked with Heal the Ocean for more than 10 years. Live jazz music was by the **Dave Vignoe** trio featuring pianist **Mel McGary**.

Following the cocktail hour and silent auction bidding, emcee **Geoff Green** welcomed everyone to their tables. He introduced **Art Cisneros**, a renowned Chumash Elder and firekeeper, who holds the sacred space for their annual Tomol crossing to Limuw on the Channel Islands. Cisneros led the blessing in both English and Chumash languages. His blessing honored our oceans, sky, and natural world, the work of SB Channelkeeper and the attendees: *“Let us honor our relationship with all the ocean and sky that the spark and great mystery in God binds us together, I ask you to invite your ancestors and Spirit Guides, along with the four directions which are outside and inside us, for help.”* He finished by singing a whale song.

Green next introduced Executive Director **Ted Morton**, who joined SB Channelkeeper in 2021. Morton grew up in Atlanta and graduated from Furman University and University of Georgia School of Law. His 25-year career to date is focused on strengthening ocean and coastal protections and policies for clean water, fisheries and coral reef conservation, estuaries, and marine mammal populations. Morton thanked Green, keynote speaker **Ben Halpern** Ph.D., the corporate and individual sponsors, his board current and past members, staff and volunteers, the event committee, and honorary committee. He then shared about moving to Santa Barbara from Washington, D.C. He views SB as an environmental leader that influences policy worldwide.



Valerie and Branden Aroyan (photo by Joanne A Calitri)

He briefed the guests on SB Channelkeeper’s accomplishments such as mentoring and teaching 37,000 local schools’ students, having 700 volunteers who have removed 130 lobster traps from our shoreline oceans area, maintaining safe drinking water, and a clean ocean. His five-year strategy plan includes a diverse community effort and working closely with the SB Harbor Commission and City Council with a clear list of 25 objectives.

“Climate change is the most significant challenge of our lifetime,” he said.

“Channelkeeper’s Board recently approved a five-year strategic plan that sets out a

course to do more to ensure that the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds, and the people and wildlife that depend on these areas, are able to counter and adapt to the intensifying impacts of climate change.”



Mimi DeGruy and Art Levitt (photo by Joanne A Calitri)

He continued, “Funds raised at the Blue Water Ball support the wide range of Channelkeeper programs, which include actively monitoring creeks and coastal waters, organizing volunteers for community cleanups, providing educational experiences for local students about water quality and habitats, and advocating for strong policies to ensure clean, safe water and healthy habitats.”

Green introduced keynote speaker Halpern, executive director of the Santa Barbara-based National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis, lead scientist for the Ocean Health Index and professor at the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management UCSB. Halpern’s talk focused on healthy oceans in a changing climate. He first thanked the Chumash elders who are and have been the keepers of protecting the local environment. He explained his journey as a research scientist, from being discouraged to presently optimistic regarding actions we can take “to

align conservation with humans connected to the oceans in a healthy way that will both thrive and is sustainable.”

His research projects have shown that there is no ocean in the world not impacted by human activity and threats to the ocean’s health are increasing. However, he also found that healthy oceans can’t exist without people connected to them. He discussed aquacultures’ positive attributes, and said, “We can’t lock up our ocean. It is resilient if we give it enough room to breathe. We still have time to turn the tide but need to act quickly. In Santa Barbara, actions you can take are to shift your mindset about the environment, eat local, support global, our fisheries are sustainable, support them, and for people to be open to solutions in unexpected areas, like aquaculture. We are defined by our actions, not our words.”

Green rallied the 200 guests for the live auction by pointing to the ocean view outside the ballroom windows and said, “That is what we are protecting and funding!” He raised approximately \$50K, though donations are still needed to meet the funding goal.

Surf’s up: Thanks from Board President **Brad Newton** to **Terry Kleid**, **Holly Sherwin**, and **Mimi DeGruy**. Thanks went also to the Catering Connection, Sunstone Winery, Sweetzer Cellars, Patagonia Provisions, Kanaloa Seafood, Montecito Bank & Trust, HG Insights, Dolphin Consulting, MarBorg Industries, and Patagonia.

411: Donations are still being accepted via www.sbck.org

Santa Barbara **Independent**

Santa Barbara Channelkeeper’s Blue Water Ball Brings in Over \$130,000

Annual Environmental Fundraiser Hosted at Cabrillo Pavilion

By **Hannah Weaver**

Fri Jun 02, 2023 | 5:57pm



From left, Tim and Talli Robinson at Santa Barbara Channelkeeper's Blue Water Ball. | Photo: Nell Campbell

Santa Barbara Channelkeeper hosted their 21st Blue Water Ball at the Cabrillo Pavilion on May 7, raising upwards of \$130,000 toward their ongoing efforts to protect and restore the Santa Barbara Watershed.

Chumash elder and firekeeper Art Cisneros started the night off with a blessing and the night continued on with live music from the Dave Vignoe jazz trio and keyboardist Mel McGary as guests browsed a large-scale art installation from local photographer Branden Aroyan. Dr. Benjamin Halpern, a professor of marine ecology and conservation planning at UCSB, delivered the keynote address, emphasizing the importance of maintaining healthy oceans amidst climate change.

The ball was just as much a fundraiser as it was a celebration of Channelkeeper's accomplishments. One such achievement was their board's recent instatement of a five-year strategic plan.

"[The plan] sets out a course to do more to ensure that the Santa Barbara Channel and its watersheds, and the people and wildlife that depend on these areas are able to counter and adapt to the intensifying impacts of climate change," executive director Ted Morton said.



From left, Ron Pulice, Stacy Pulice, Robin Himovitz, Roger Himovitz, Mimi deGruy, and Art Levitt at Santa Barbara Channelkeeper's Blue Water Ball. | Photo: Nell Campbell



From left, Ted Morton, Dr. Benjamin Halpern, and Geoff Green at Santa Barbara Channelkeeper's Blue Water Ball. | Photo: Nell Campbell



From left, Santa Barbara Channelkeeper student volunteers Tara Zahraie, Hana Subrahmanyam, and Brynn Campos overlooking the ocean on the deck of Cabrillo Pavilion. | Photo: Nell Campbell

The money raised from the Blue Water Ball will help Channelkeeper continue its educational programs, advocacy work, and research.

“[The funds raised] make it possible for Channelkeeper to protect local beaches, creeks, and coast, and defend the community’s right to clean water and healthy habitats,” said Santa Barbara Channelkeeper spokesperson Laura Sanchez.

For more information, see sbck.org.