FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pacific Marine Mammal Center Raises Nearly $430,000 at Most Successful Gala to Date

*An annual fundraiser to raise funds for PMMC's marine mammal patients, education and conservation programs hits a high note.*

Laguna Beach, CA Thursday, September 12, 2019 - Pacific Marine Mammal Center (PMMC) hosted their "Call of the Sea Gala" fundraiser on Sunday, September 8, 2019, at The Ranch in Laguna Beach. This year's event was the most successful to date raising nearly $430,000 for PMMC's marine mammal patients, education programs, and research and conservation initiatives.

The event kicked off with a tribute video of co-founder John Cunningham. Cunningham who started PMMC, or then known as Friends of the Sea Lion, back in 1971 with Jim Stauffer, continues to be intimately involved with the organization, and this was an opportunity to reflect on his contributions to the organization and the greater community over the years. Without a dry eye in the house, he received a standing ovation.

"It truly has been a pleasure and an honor - to continue his dream of what he started nearly 50 years ago," said Director of Animal Care, Michele Hunter, who has worked with John the past 30 years.

"JC - Thank you for being a mentor, thank you for being a friend, thank you for being a game changer and inspiration in my life," said The Ranch's owner, Mark Christy, a former student and longtime friend of Cunningham's.

The night also honored PMMC's Philanthropist of the Year Western Digital and Junior Philanthropist of the Year Chloe Mei Espinosa, founder of the Skip the Plastic Straw Campaign.

Western Digital and PMMC's partnership began in 2017. Over 400 Western Digital employees have participated in collaborative beach clean-ups and other volunteer events at PMMC, including scrubbing pens, cleaning pools and weighing fish to help our animal care team. Volunteering and giving back to their community is a cornerstone of Western Digital's culture. Employees are encouraged and inspired to come together, get involved and help protect and preserve the environment.

Chloe Mei Espinosa, PMMC’s Junior Philanthropist of the Year started her "Skip the Plastic Straw" campaign when she was in 6th grade. What started as just a school project, her goal was to raise awareness in her local community and to reduce the use of single-use plastic. She has now taken her campaign a step further. Since her web launch in April of 2018 she has convinced three school districts - 128 total schools - and a nonprofit health care organization in Orange County to Skip the Plastic Straw in all their cafeterias.

"Western Digital and Chloe Mei Espinosa embody the considerable and much-needed support that we get in the community. This comes in so many forms and helps us in every aspect of what we do, whether it's our animal care operations, greater
conservation efforts, education and outreach programs, or scientific research. We are not going to be able to fulfill our mission alone. It's been a collaborative effort since Day 1 as this philosophical methodology of getting things accomplished is embedded in our culture," said Peter Chang, CEO of PMMC.

Philanthropist of the Year, Western Digital.

Junior Philanthropist of the Year, Chloe Mei Espinosa.
Wine locker winner took home 53 premium bottles of wine.

Silent auction items including pieces from Wyland and Tuvalu.

Entertainment provided by the Wheeland Brothers

Tribute to John Cunningham.

Let the bidding begin.

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**About Pacific Marine Mammal Center**

The Pacific Marine Mammal Center rescues, rehabilitates and releases marine mammals and inspires ocean stewardship through research, education and collaboration. Pacific Marine Mammal Center is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Our Tax-ID number is: 95-3680896

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