

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Living Coast Discovery Center to Celebrate Grand Opening of Two New Exhibits On Saturday, March 19

*Unveiling of new exhibit, **Passport to the Pacific: A Tour Around the World's Largest Ocean**, coincides with the re-opening of Turtle Lagoon following major \$300,000 enhancement project*

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**CHULA VISTA, CALIF. (MARCH 10, 2016)** – The [Living Coast Discovery Center](#) announced today that it will celebrate the grand opening of two exhibits on Saturday, March 19, including a new exhibit showcasing unique animals and habitats from around the Pacific Ocean and the return of the zoo/aquarium's beloved sea turtles to the newly renovated and expanded **Turtle Lagoon** exhibit.

Construction began in early-January on a major enhancement project for the Living Coast's signature Turtle Lagoon exhibit, located at the entrance to the zoo/aquarium on San Diego Bay in Chula Vista. The \$300,000 project now provides the Living Coast's beloved animal ambassadors, endangered Eastern Pacific green sea turtles, with additional space to swim freely, as well as offer more interactive elements to enhance the learning experience for visitors and students. The sea turtles, which were temporarily relocated to an AZA-accredited facility during construction, will return to their home in the new Turtle Lagoon for the public grand opening.

Coinciding with the re-opening of Turtle Lagoon is the unveiling of the Living Coast's newest exhibit, ***Passport to the Pacific: A Tour Around the World's Largest Ocean***. The fun, travel-inspired exhibit showcases the diverse animals that make their homes in and around the Pacific region. Guests will "travel" through the tropical rainforests of Central and South America, the coral reefs of the South Pacific, the sandy beaches and mangroves of Australia, and the deserts and coastal waters of North America.

*Passport to the Pacific* features several new animal ambassadors, including a scarlet macaw, blue tongued skink, tokay gecko, land and aquatic hermit crabs, banded archerfish, and Australian and Central Pacific coral reef communities. They join dozens of the Living Coast's year-round animal favorites from the Pacific region, including the Eastern Pacific green sea turtles, two-spot and giant Pacific octopus, and various species of sharks, rays, snakes, frogs, fish, birds of prey, and more.

*Passport to the Pacific* also includes a number of new interactive components for guests to experience in their Pacific wildlife journey, including a hanging mangrove, video rain forest "tree," and a Velcro wall to "climb" like a gecko. "Selfie stops" will also be set up throughout the exhibit for guests to capture their wildlife travel experience.

The exhibit, which is included with paid admission to the Living Coast, runs through Labor Day (Sept. 5).

The Living Coast will celebrate the grand opening of both exhibits on Saturday, March 19 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. with up-close animal encounters, docent-led tours, animal feedings/presentations, face-painting, arts/crafts and more. To plan your day, view the animal feeding schedules or to reserve a private VIP animal encounter, visit <http://www.thelivingcoast.org/programs/animal-encounters/> or call (619) 409-5900.

### More About the Turtle Lagoon Enhancement Project

The Turtle Lagoon enhancement project has increased the water volume of the pool from 4,000 gallons to 6,000 gallons, providing the sea turtles with more space to swim freely and accommodate their anticipated growth over the coming years. More interactive elements have been added to the exhibit, including a turtle nest, a life-sized turtle, and “ways to help do your part” interpretive displays. This was the Living Coast’s first major capital improvement project in a decade. Turtle Lagoon was originally constructed in 2005 as part of a \$3 million renovation project at what was then known as the Chula Vista Nature Center.

The campaign to enhance the existing Turtle Lagoon exhibit was kicked off by a devoted supporter of the center, who first stepped forward with a significant donation in 2013, when a major funding shortfall threatened the Living Coast’s future. Following the organization’s successful financial turnaround and the implementation of a new strategic plan over the past two years, the Nelson family was looking for a way to make a meaningful, long-term impact at the Living Coast. The Turtle Lagoon enhancement project, which had been in a conceptual phase for some time, was identified as the ideal opportunity, and a fundraising campaign was launched to bring the project to fruition.

The Turtle Lagoon enhancement project was made possible by the generosity of a number of community supporters, including the Nelson Family, The Orca Fund at The San Diego Foundation, Walton Family Foundation, Frank and Joan Roseman Family, Ken and Dina Weimer, the Hattie Ettinger Fund at The San Diego Foundation, Susan Fuller and Marine Group Boat Works.

To date, the Living Coast has raised over \$275,000, nearly 92 percent of its \$300,000 funding goal, from foundations, companies and individuals in the community for the Turtle Lagoon enhancement project. The organization is still looking for additional financial support for Turtle Lagoon, in order to provide additional interpretive elements, theming, and continued care for the sea turtles and their habitat. All donors that make a gift of \$1,000 or more will be recognized with a turtle plaque on the exhibit’s new donor wall. To learn more about how to support the Living Coast and its sea turtle animal ambassadors, visit <http://www.thelivingcoast.org>.

All sea turtles found in U.S. waters are currently listed as endangered or threatened by the Endangered Species Act. Eastern Pacific green sea turtles, the species featured in Turtle Lagoon, are the more common species found along our local coastline. The Living Coast is also home to a rescued loggerhead sea turtle that resides in the center’s Shark and Ray Experience, which came to the Living Coast in 2014 following its rehabilitation from injuries sustained by multiple boat strikes near the Florida Keys.

**About the Living Coast Discovery Center**

*The Living Coast Discovery, a 501(c) 3 educational zoo and aquarium located within the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge on San Diego Bay, began operating as a non-profit in 2010 after assuming operations of the Chula Vista Nature Center. The Living Coast Discovery offers hands-on exhibits and up-close encounters with more than 350 plant and animal species native to Southern California coastal habitats, including endangered sea turtles, sting rays, leopard sharks, jellies, shorebirds, reptiles and a large collection of raptors such as hawks, falcons, owls, bald eagle, golden eagle, and more. More information about the Living Coast Discovery Center is available at [www.thelivingcoast.org](http://www.thelivingcoast.org) or (619) 409-5900.*

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