

Botanic Garden Hosts Delightful Beer Garden

Beers Crafted to Go with Botanical Surroundings



Photo: **Gail Arnold**Event Co-chairs and Trustees Jesse Smith and Sarah Berkus Gower

The Santa Barbara Botanic Garden's annual fundraiser — the Santa Barbara Beer Garden — was once again an extraordinarily enjoyable event. On March 23, 15 breweries spread throughout the magnificent garden offered beers carefully crafted to go with their botanical surroundings. Thoughtful gourmet food pairings from area food purveyors, live instrumental music, botanical exhibits, and a welcoming, fun crowd rounded out this fabulous experience. The fundraiser supports the garden's programs in environmental education, conservation and research, and native plant horticulture. The 200 tickets sold out within hours, but a new conditional-use permit will allow 400 lucky souls to attend next year.

For VIP ticket holders, the event started with the Grand Cru party on the stunning grounds and inside the Pritzlaff Conservation Center, which featured the premiere of the Montecito Inn's newest restaurant, Sushi | Bar. Guests got a sit-down tasting of omakase sushi. Opening mid-April, the restaurant will offer a 17-course meal for \$110 and an 8-course meal at a TBD price in 12-person seatings Wednesday-Sunday. Specialty craft cocktails were provided by Shaker Mill, a new venture of the Good Lion, which will be at 418 State Street.

Botanic Garden Executive Director Steve Windhager welcomed the guests and encouraged them to return any day throughout the year to enjoy a picnic at the new Island View Garden adjacent to where we stood. He related how the Botanic Garden is more than a pretty place: It has a very important conservation mission, and the staff works throughout the Central Coast to make sure that no plant species goes extinct. To this end, the Botanic Garden helps land managers at the Nature Conservancy, National Park Service, National Forest Service, and Department of Defense better manage their properties every year. Windhager noted how the garden has classes and field trips to the islands and to great California wildflower fields with some of the best guides in the region.

Guests then crossed the street for the main event, where they were given a map and eloquent tasting notes written by beer expert Zachary Rosen, who collaborated with area breweries and chefs to design the ultimate tasting experience. Rosen bid guests to "walk into the redwood grove with [The Brewhouse's] red IPA featuring a touch of caramel malts and piney notes coming from redwood tips and local hops." He suggested, "Stand on the historic Mission Dam and let [M.Special's] strong golden brew softened by vanilla and crystalized ginger highlight the gentle babble of water and surrounding wild ginger." Many of the brewers were personally serving their creations and visiting with guests, including Island Brewing's Ryan Morrill, Figueroa Mountain Brewing's Kevin Ashford and Andre Espinoza, and Night Lizard Brewing's Chip Nasser (co-owner) and Clay Brackley.

Among the exquisite food and beer pairings were Hotel Corque's Root 246's Heritage Pork & Apple Compote with Smoked Onion paired with Smoke Mountain Brewery's Bay Laurel Saison. Root 246's highly acclaimed chef Crystal "Pink" DeLongpre personally served up their creations and visited with guests. Several restaurant owners were also on hand, including Bibi Ji's Alejandro Medina and Satellite's Drew Cuddy.

As if enjoying superb beer and food, interacting with chefs and brewers, perusing botanic exhibits, and taking in spectacular scenery weren't enough, the event also featured live music — a harpist at the entrance, a fiddle and guitar player in the Meadow, and woodwinds in the Manzanita Section.

Now is a great time to visit the garden. According to Windhager, this year's rains have been just what the garden's native plants needed. "Many plants in the garden are already showing off their spring color — such as in the new Island View Garden — while the meadow will really begin its show in April. And Mission Creek is flowing!"

The Botanic Garden has 5.5 miles of paths meandering through 78 acres of scenic grounds, which contain more than 1,000 different taxa of plants. It offers a wide range of classes for the general public as well as school programs. Memberships provide essential support and come with myriad benefits. The garden's Spring Native Plant Sale runs March 30-May 5 and offers thousands of varieties of plants.

For more info about the Botanic Garden, go to sbbg.org.



Photo: **Gail Arnold** Executive Director Steve Windhager, his wife, Pamme Mickelson, and Beer Expert Zachary Rosen



Photo: **Gail Arnold** Former board chair Peter Schuyler, Board Chair Tom Craveiro, and Treasurer Edward Roach



Photo: **Gail Arnold** Draughtsmen Aleworks brewmaster Reno King serving Awesome Possum IPA with hops and dried apricots



Photo: **Gail Arnold**Event Committee Members Justin Crider and Gillian Conway

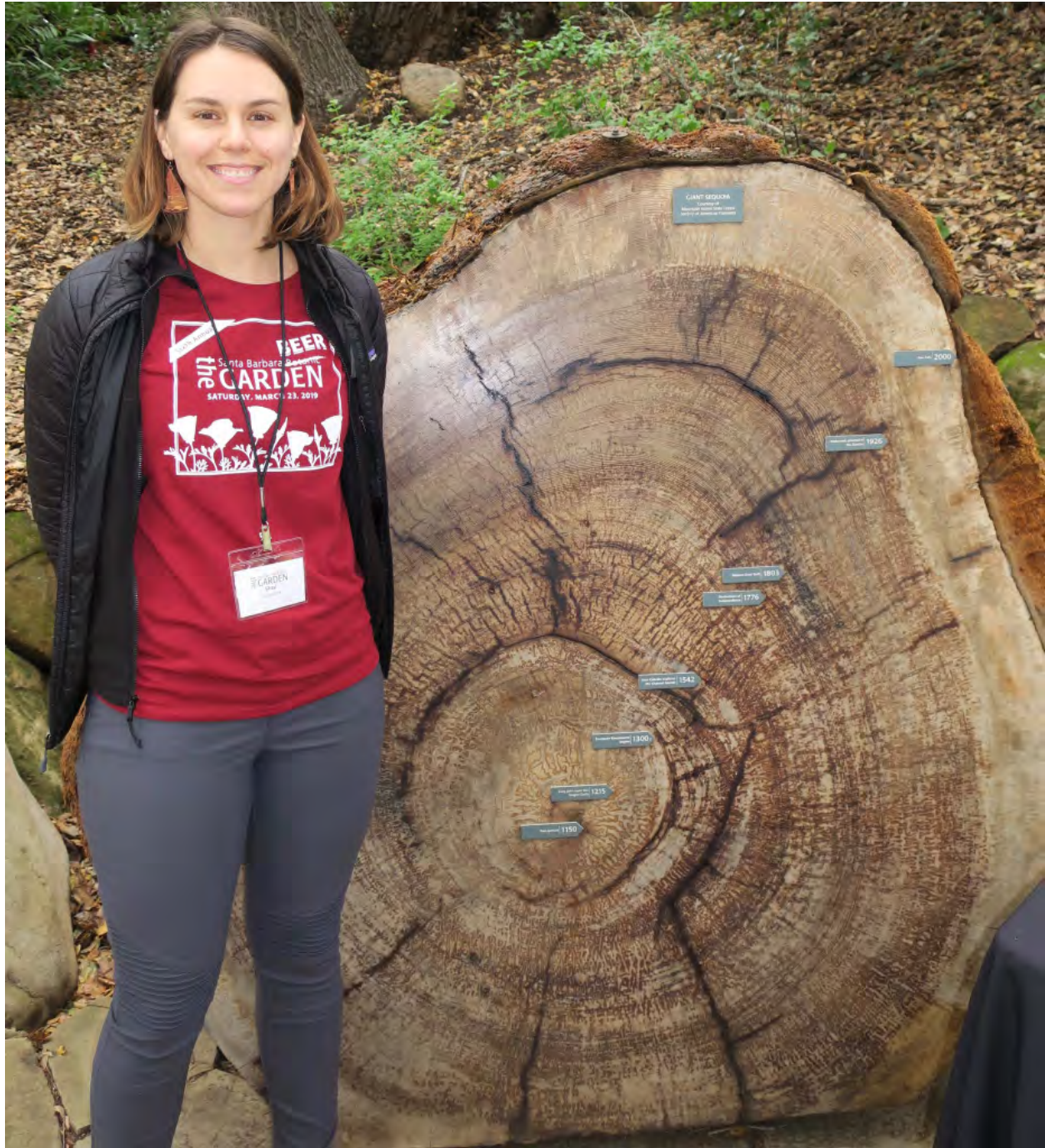


Photo: **Gail Arnold**Volunteer Shay Hopkins explains what experts can ascertain from the rings on this 850-year-old redwood.



Photo: **Gail Arnold** Chris Parker and Event Committee Member Marisa Parker



Photo: **Gail Arnold**Sushi | Bar team: Brian Lockwood, Melissa Esposito, Lennon Lee (head chef), and Phillip Frankland Lee (chef/owner)

Send invites to gail@independent.com.



Gail Arnold
Columnist