



## CATALINA ISLAND CONSERVANCY

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### **Keck Foundation Funds Catalina Island Conservancy's Educational Program *NatureWorks to Provide Scientific Learning to Avalon Students***

**AVALON** – The W.M. Keck Foundation, one of the nation's largest philanthropic organizations, recently awarded a generous grant to the Catalina Island Conservancy to initiate NatureWorks, an innovative school program to serve Avalon students from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade with hands-on learning about ecology and the environment.

With the foundation's \$200,000 grant, NatureWorks will expand the Conservancy's current kindergarten to middle school program into an integrated program that extends through the 12th grade. It will provide the critical science learning needed to excel in today's demanding job market while enhancing regular curricula.

NatureWorks will serve as a workforce development program by helping prepare Catalina students for an ecotourism career track, if they are interested in the Island's most important industry.

"We thank the W.M. Keck Foundation for its generous grant award to develop the Conservancy's NatureWorks program so that all of Avalon's students can benefit from this innovative ecological literacy and career track program," said Ann M. Muscat, PhD, the Conservancy's president and CEO. "This grant helps the Conservancy continue to fulfill its commitment to partnering with the Avalon community to enrich the lives of its young people and residents. Through NatureWorks, the Conservancy's trained naturalists and educators will take students into the field, where they can see firsthand how nature works and have those lifelong memories of discovery that will enrich their lives and prepare them for successful careers on and off the Island."

Avalon Schools is part of the Long Beach School District, and the Conservancy's NatureWorks program is a partnership with the district's Linked Learning Program. Linked Learning is a high school program designed to make learning exciting, challenging and relevant.

The W.M. Keck Foundation gift will make it possible for the Conservancy and Avalon Schools to connect strong academics to field experiences on Catalina and build a model for how school systems and conservation organizations can collaborate to expand environmental stewardship

training and Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) education, with a particular focus on underserved youth.

“The Conservancy already plays a vital role in STEM learning for our students through the Education Department’s partnership with our school,” said Avalon Schools Principal Angelica Gonzalez. “We are very pleased the W.M. Keck Foundation's generous gift will make it possible for all Avalon students to continue to benefit from NatureWorks in a more strategic format.”

NatureWorks will pair customized portions of the Conservancy’s environmental education program with Avalon Schools’ curricula to deliver a powerful set of teaching tools for all of Catalina’s students. By creating this curriculum, then reviewing and refining it, the Conservancy will create the model for school systems and conservation organizations to work together to augment both STEM and environmental stewardship learning.

“As we know at Long Beach Unified School District, the opportunity for students to experience science through nature and see the relevance of their education in the real world can help them accomplish even more in school and in life,” said Principal Gonzalez. “Expanding NatureWorks will enhance the school district's Linked Learning philosophy, and we know that these types of programs will lead to higher graduation rates, increased college enrollments and higher earning potential.”

### **About the Keck Foundation**

Based in Los Angeles, the W. M. Keck Foundation was established in 1954 by the late W. M. Keck, founder of the Superior Oil Company. The Foundation’s grant making is focused primarily on pioneering efforts in the areas of medical, science and engineering research. The Foundation also maintains an undergraduate education program that promotes distinctive learning and research experiences for students in the sciences and in the liberal arts, and a Southern California Grant Program that provides support for the Los Angeles community, with a special emphasis on children and youth from low-income families, special needs populations and safety-net services. For more information, please visit [www.wmkeck.org](http://www.wmkeck.org).

### **About the Conservancy**

Formed in 1972, the Catalina Island Conservancy is one of California's oldest land trusts. Its mission is to be a responsible steward of its lands through a balance of conservation, education and recreation. Through its ongoing efforts, the Conservancy protects the magnificent natural and cultural heritage of Santa Catalina Island, stewarding approximately 42,000 acres of land and more than 60 miles of rugged shoreline. It provides an airport and 50 miles of biking and nearly 150 miles of hiking opportunities within its road and trail system. The Conservancy conducts educational outreach through two nature centers, its Wrigley Memorial & Botanic

Garden and guided experiences in the Island's rugged interior. Twenty miles from the mainland, the Island is a treasure trove of historical and archaeological sites. It also contains numerous rare and endangered animals and plants. The Island is home to 60 species – and counting – that are found only on Catalina. For additional information, please visit [www.catalinaconservancy.org](http://www.catalinaconservancy.org).