



# NEWS RELEASE

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## The Santa Barbara Zoo Welcomes Four New Board Members

(May 29, 2024) Santa Barbara, CA - The [Santa Barbara Zoo](#) is pleased to announce four new members have joined the Board of Directors: **Mitch Avila**, **Sarah Berkus Gower**, **Bob Looney**, and **Robyn Parker**. The Zoo's Board of Directors works together to serve and support the Zoo's mission and dedication to the preservation, conservation, and enhancement of the natural world and its living treasures through education, research, and recreation.

**Mitch Avila** is Provost at California State University Channel Islands where he is leading the conversation to adopt a multi-year strategic enrollment plan and expansion of academic programs. He has three decades of experience in the CSU system at four campuses, including five years' experience as Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities at California State University Dominguez Hills. In that role, Avila served on the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences Board of Directors, where he promoted advocacy efforts for federal funding for the arts, humanities, and sciences. As Associate Dean and Chair of the Philosophy Department at Cal State Fullerton, Avila directed professional development for adjunct faculty, expanded study abroad programs, reorganized cultural centers, and developed innovative new degrees, including Vietnamese Studies. He holds a PhD in Philosophy from UC Santa Barbara (1993) and researches theories of human rights and global justice, along with the aesthetics of film and photography.

**Sarah Berkus Gower** practiced as an attorney at Hollister & Brace with a focus in complex litigation for over a decade and now enjoys the flexibility of legal consulting and volunteering. She holds degrees from USC's Marshall School of Business and the University of Denver Sturm College of Law, as well as Certificates in ESG and Sustainability from UC Berkeley Law and Stanford Earth. She is also a licensed California real estate agent. Sarah served six years on the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden's Board of Trustees, where she played key roles in the planning and development of the "Backcountry" children's garden. She also served as Co-Chair of the Santa Barbara Yacht Club Yachts of Love Charity Regatta benefitting Visiting Nurse and Hospice Care. She is actively involved in the Cold Spring Elementary School Parent Club and a new member of the Zoofari Ball Committee. Sarah is a third generation Santa Barbarian and is a lover of all things outdoors. She enjoys traveling, skiing, and spending time at the Zoo with her husband Hayden and son Luca.

**Bob Looney** has been a realtor for the past 19 years following a 25-year radio career at Golden West Broadcasters, KMPC Radio in Hollywood. Earlier in his career he spent three years at Mattel as a salesman, followed by a four-year stint at Carson/Roberts Advertising as an account executive working on Mattel's Hot Wheels campaigns. Bob has wonderful memories of growing up in Santa Barbara prior to leaving to attend the University of Utah.

**Robyn Parker** earned a degree in Business Economics at UC Santa Barbara and worked as a Program Officer for the Hutton Parker Foundation while serving on the Foundation's Grant Selection Committee. She currently volunteers for CASA, Visiting Nurse & Hospice Care, Santa Barbara City College – Alumni Association, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, Santa Barbara Bowl – Education Outreach, and the Santa Barbara Maritime Museum. A longtime supporter of the Zoo, Parker served on the Discovery Pavilion committee, on the Board (2015 – 2021), and has been a member of the Zoofari Ball Committee since 2015. She was Zoofari's Honorary Chair alongside her husband Jess in 2022, was instrumental in the creation of the Zoo's "Buzz Cart" and led the Zoo's Annual Appeal in 2022. A fifth generation Santa Barbarian, Robyn is currently a stay-at-home mom of daughters Paisley and Skye and is heavily involved in her children's school, volunteering as room parent and serving on the parent council board. In her spare time, she enjoys spending time with her family.

To learn more about how to support the Santa Barbara Zoo please visit <https://www.sbzoo.org/support/> or contact Liz Hahn, Director of Advancement, at [lhahn@sbzoo.org](mailto:lhahn@sbzoo.org) or by calling (805) 962-5339.

### **About the Santa Barbara Zoo**

The Santa Barbara Zoo is open daily from 9 a.m. for members and 9:30 a.m. for general admission until 5 p.m.; general admission is \$25 for adults, \$15 for children 2-12, and free for children under 2. Parking is \$11. The Santa Barbara Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). AZA zoos are dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great visitor experience, and a better future for all living things. With its more than 200 accredited members, AZA is a leader in global wildlife conservation and is the public's link to helping animals in their native habitats. Visit [www.sbzoo.org](http://www.sbzoo.org).

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