



ALAMEDA PARK
SANTA BARBARA, CA

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CEC Announces 2026 Environmental Heroes Ahead of Santa Barbara Earth Day Festival

Megan Birney Rudert and Assemblymember Gregg Hart to be honored at April 25-26 celebration in Alameda Park

April 7, 2026 (SANTA BARBARA, CALIF) – The Community Environmental Council (CEC) has announced its 2026 Environmental Heroes, honoring Megan Birney Rudert and Assemblymember Gregg Hart for their leadership and innovation in advancing climate solutions. The awards will be presented at the 56th annual Santa Barbara Earth Day Festival, returning to Alameda Park April 25–26, 2026.

One of the longest-running Earth Day celebrations in the country—and among the largest on the West Coast—the Santa Barbara Earth Day Festival is a beloved community tradition that brings together thousands of attendees for a weekend of environmental action, education, and celebration. The free, two-day event will take place Saturday, April 25 from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and Sunday, April 26 from 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.

Presented by CEC and produced by longtime partner CarpEvents, the festival continues to serve as a leading hub for environmental engagement on the Central Coast.

"It has never been more important for us to celebrate, learn, and activate for our planet, our communities, and future generations," said Kathi King, CEC's Director of Education and Operations. "Santa Barbara continues to lead by example, demonstrating what a sustainable future can look like even amid national challenges. The Santa Barbara Earth Day Festival is a chance to come together, turn challenges into opportunities, and inspire lasting change."

This year's theme, *Our Power, Our Planet*, aligns with EARTHDAY.ORG's global call to action, emphasizing the

collective strength of communities to drive climate solutions and protect the health of our environment, economy, and future. The message is clear: real change is people-powered.

In that spirit, CEC's 2026 Environmental Heroes exemplify the power of individual leadership to create global impact.

Megan Birney Rudert, President & CEO of [Unite to Light](#), leads a Santa Barbara-based nonprofit expanding access to clean, affordable solar light and energy in off-grid communities worldwide. Under her leadership, Unite to Light has distributed hundreds of thousands of solar lights and chargers – reducing reliance on harmful kerosene while improving health, safety, and opportunity. Her work enables students to study after dark, supports safer childbirth, and provides reliable power in disaster zones.

Assemblymember Gregg Hart represents California's 37th Assembly District. Over more than three decades of public service, he has been a steadfast advocate for protecting California's environment and coastline. He has passed legislation to plug idle oil wells faster, hold operators accountable, and require environmental review for aging coastal infrastructure – in addition to establishing the California Protecting Blue Whales and Blue Skies program. Building on this work, Assemblymember Hart is organizing the inaugural California Ocean Summit in Santa Barbara to bring together global leaders in ocean stewardship and advance solutions.

The Environmental Hero ceremony will take place on **Sunday, April 26 from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.** on the Main Stage in Alameda Park. Megan and Assemblymember Hart will be recognized during the ceremony, emceed by KEYT News anchor Tracy Lehr.

The 2026 [Santa Barbara Earth Day Festival](#) will feature more than 200 eco-friendly exhibitors, a Green Car Show with free "Ride & Drive" experiences, live music across two days, a plant-forward food court, Beer & Wine Garden, Kids Zone, and more.

"It's inspiring to see how deeply our community cares about environmental stewardship," said Mike Lazaro, CEO of CarpEvents and Festival Producer. "The Santa Barbara Earth Day Festival brings that passion to life in a way that's engaging, hands-on, and fun for all ages. Each year, the urgency of the climate crisis grows – but so does our community's commitment to solutions."

The festival is expected to draw tens of thousands of attendees from across the Central Coast. Community members are encouraged to learn more and get involved at [SBEarthDay.org](#):

- **Exhibit:** [SBEarthDay.org/exhibit](#)
- **Sponsor:** [SBEarthDay.org/sponsor](#)
- **Volunteer:** [SBEarthDay.org/volunteer](#)
- **Follow:** @SB_EarthDay on Instagram and Facebook

Santa Barbara Earth Day Festival partners and sponsors to date include Marborg, Rivian, Firestone 805, Juneshine, Brander Vineyard, Flying Shade, Bye Bye Mattress, Central Coast Clean Cities Coalition, Central Coast Community Energy, Channel Islands Restoration, Chumash Foundation, City of Santa Barbara - Sustainability & Resilience, Cox, e-Bikery, E-Rentals & Tents Inc, Islay Events, Jonny Pops, the Learningden Preschool, Matilija Pure Water Systems, Montecito Bank & Trust, the Santa Barbara Foundation, the Santa Barbara Independent, Skyhook Solar, Target, TV Santa Barbara, Voice Magazine, and Yerba Madre.

About Santa Barbara's Earth Day

Widely acknowledged as the birthplace of Earth Day, Santa Barbara's involvement began with the devastating 1969 oil spill off its coast. This led a local group of concerned citizens to begin discussing a

different way of looking at environmental systems. During that time, Senator Gaylord Nelson visited Santa Barbara to view the oil spill damage. When he returned to Washington, D.C., he introduced a bill designating April 22 as a national day to celebrate the earth. Over the next few years, the environmental movement was born across the country – including the Community Environmental Council (CEC). Led by a group of forward-thinking youth and elders, CEC incorporated in the spring of 1970 and its first act as a new nonprofit was to hold an Earth Day celebration – a one block long teach-in between State Street and Chapala Street along Anapamu. Around the country, 20 million concerned citizens attended similar events. We recognize that “every day is earth day” and that special events like this are a way to bring diverse voices from our community together as a reminder to tread lightly on the planet.

About the Community Environmental Council (CEC)

CEC advances rapid, equitable solutions to the climate crisis, including transitioning to 100% clean energy and transportation, promoting climate-smart agriculture and regenerative food systems, reducing waste and single-use plastics, and strengthening community resilience. CEC also leads innovative programs such as the Climate Stewards certification, which equips Central Coast residents to take meaningful local climate action, and operates the Environmental Hub in downtown Santa Barbara as a center for public engagement and collaboration.

Recognized as a 2020 California Nonprofit of the Year and a City of Santa Barbara Climate Hero, CEC is led by CEO Sigrid Wright, named 2022 Congressional Woman of the Year. Learn more about CEC’s impacts at [CECSB.org/impact](https://cecsb.org/impact).

About CarpEvents

With over 30 years’ experience in event management, Mike Lazaro (Carpenterian of the Year), and the CarpEvents team have been producing seamless events from concept to completion across the country and right here in Santa Barbara County. Mike has been involved from the ground up on fundraisers, street festivals, concerts, large corporate conventions, and televised sporting events. In addition, the team provides logistical and managerial support on major events such as Summer Solstice and Avocado Festival as well as co-founded the Alcazar Theatre in Carpinteria and the Rods and Roses Car show. Visit <https://www.carpinteriaevents.com/>
