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CONTACT: Joe Haakenson
JUVE Creative, Inc.
(714) 841 9600
joe@juvecreative.com

MISSION GATE HOUSE PRESERVATION PROJECT UNDERWAY

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, CA. – Dec. 14, 2011 – And when the shovel hit the dirt, it began.

Mission San Juan Capistrano celebrated the onset of the Gate House Preservation Project with a ceremonial ground breaking Wednesday morning at the Mission, the birthplace of Orange County recognized as a historic landmark and museum.

Local dignitaries were on hand to witness the start of Phase I of the Gate House Preservation Project, which includes the construction of the Mission's new group entry, plaza and wall along Camino Capistrano. Those in attendance included San Juan Capistrano Mayor Larry Kramer, Mayor Pro Tem John Taylor, City Manager Karen Brust and city council member Sam Allevato.

"This phase of the project is only happening because of the incredible generosity of our leadership and private supporters who believe that the entry of the Mission should be architecturally inviting and preserve its most historic elements at the same time," said Mechelle Lawrence-Adams, Executive Director of Mission San Juan Capistrano. "We hope to give the community a project that it can be proud of and celebrate for generations to come."

Speaking before a gathering of about 100, Lawrence-Adams praised the Mission Preservation Foundation for turning the idea of the Gate House Preservation Project into reality.

"This Foundation has achieved what 100 years ago the Landmarks Club wanted to achieve," she said.

Mission Preservation Foundation President George O'Connell directed onlookers to take note of the existing Gate House, which was built in the early 1900s.

"The last time a Gate House was built here was 1916," O'Connell said. "That building right there, Father (St. John) O'Sullivan probably was in that building selling tickets himself."

Said Foundation board member Wylie Aitken: "It's tremendous to restore the Mission each step of the way to its former glory. It's an inspiration to the people of this community, including my son, and for the rest of us who don't live in San Juan, it makes us envious to see the ongoing restoration of such an incredible national and historical jewel."

The Gate House Preservation Project will ultimately safely accommodate the operational use of the Gate House and relocate the current gift shop out of the rich and historic 18th Century Sala Building as part of Phase II.

The project enhances and protects the most historic elements of the existing Gate House while improving access, safety, and staging of thousands of school children who queue on sidewalks that are just four feet wide today. The project also will lengthen the hours of the downtown's busy period and reinforce its identity by providing a museum store on the street-front after hours.

The project has the overwhelming support of the city, Mayor Kramer said.

"It's great for the Mission, it's great for the city," Kramer said. "I don't think there's anybody who doesn't love what the Mission has proposed. Some changes to downtown are controversial, some are not, but this is not. I love it.

"Mechelle has done a tremendous job. In my short time here, nine years, the Mission has blossomed. ... You ask why people come to San Juan and it's because of the historical significance. We have fine restaurants, but the Mission is the heart, it's why people come. There are other historical sites in the city, but the Mission is the jewel."

PHOTOS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

About Mission San Juan Capistrano:

Known as the "Jewel of the Missions," Mission San Juan Capistrano is a historic landmark and museum that boasts of quality permanent exhibits featuring original artifacts as well as traveling and temporary exhibits on a wide variety of topics.

The site itself serves as a living outdoor museum with original buildings constructed by Native Americans in the 18th century including the Serra Chapel, Great Stone Church, and the original padres' quarters of the South Wing.

The Mission was founded on November 1, 1776 by Padre Junipero Serra as the seventh in the chain of the twenty-one California missions established by Spain, and is Orange County's only mission. Every year, over 50,000 students visit the Mission and engage in an inspirational learning experience via the Mission Matters programming, as part of their State required California history studies.

Mission San Juan Capistrano is owned by the Diocese of Orange and is supported by the Mission Preservation Foundation, which is comprised of business and community leaders committed to ensuring the long term preservation and viability of Orange County's only Mission. The Mission receives no funding from either the Church or the State of California and charges admission funds as a means of providing public access.

Mission San Juan Capistrano is located at 26801 Ortega Highway, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675. Open Daily 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Good Friday afternoon. Admission is \$9 adults; \$8 seniors (60 years or over); \$5 children (ages 4 to 11); and children ages 3 and under are admitted free. Free audio guide with senior and adult admission. For more information, call (949) 234-1300 or visit www.missionsjc.com.