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

ST. JOSEPH'S DAY AND THE RETURN OF THE SWALLOWS CELEBRATION

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, CA (Feb. 15, 2012) -- Mission San Juan Capistrano once again will draw attention from the four corners of the earth when it hosts St. Joseph's Day and the Return of the Swallows celebration on Monday, March 19, from 10 a.m.-3 p.m.

Among the day's highlights are the Ringing of the Historic Bells in honor of St. Joseph's Day and the Swallows Return at 10 a.m. and again at noon. The official bell ringing ceremony will take place at 11:55 a.m. There also will be live mariachi music, community presentations, Mission Parish School performances, San Juan Elementary performances and the history of St. Joseph's Day and Swallows Legend.

Another highlight of the day will be the return of renowned cliff swallows expert, Dr. Charles R. Brown, who will give a lecture on the swallows in the Soldiers Barracks Gallery from 2-3 p.m.

Cost for general admission to this signature event is \$10 for adults, \$9 for seniors (60+) and \$5 for children (ages 4-11). Admission is free for Mission Preservation Society Members, active volunteers with identification, and children ages 3 and under.

The swallows are said to migrate annually to Goya, Argentina, in October, and return to their spring and summer home in San Juan Capistrano each March. The Swallows celebration began centuries ago when Mission padres observed that the birds' return roughly coincided with St. Joseph's Day on the church calendar, March 19. The celebration has achieved international prominence since then.

In his book, *Capistrano Nights*, Father St. John O'Sullivan, Pastor of Mission San Juan Capistrano from 1910-33, related how the swallows first came to call the Mission home. One day, while walking through town, Father O'Sullivan saw a shopkeeper, broomstick in hand, knocking down the conically shaped mud swallow nests that were under the eaves of his shop. The birds were darting back and forth through the air squealing over the destruction of their homes.

"What in the world are you doing?" Father O'Sullivan asked.

"Why, these dirty birds are a nuisance and I am getting rid of them!" the shopkeeper responded.

"But where can they go?" Father Sullivan responded.

"I don't know and I don't care," the shopkeeper replied, slashing away with his pole. "But they've no business here, destroying my property."

Father O'Sullivan then said, "Come on swallows, I'll give you shelter. Come to the Mission. There's room enough there for all."

The very next morning, the padre discovered the swallows busy building their nests outside the newly restored sacristy of Father Serra's Church. Another favorite spot was the ruins of the Great Stone Church, which was once lined with hundreds of swallows' nests.

General admission tickets are available now, in person at the Gate House, which is open 363 days per year. Tickets may also be purchased on event day. Reserved seating is not offered for this event, but it is recommended that visitors make an RSVP separately for Dr. Brown's lecture by phone at 949-234-1321.

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.