UC SANTA BARBARA

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Healing Our Ocean

Driven to improve and safeguard the health of our oceans through science and technology, Marc and Lynne Benioff have made a gift of $60 million to UC Santa Barbara, one of the world's most important marine research centers.

The new donation is the largest ever for ocean science at UC Santa Barbara — and one of the largest known gifts anywhere to support ocean research.

The gift builds on the Benioffs' legacy of support to the campus to address ocean problems and advance science-based solutions and establishes the new Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory. They previously have invested more than $28 million in ocean programs and collaborative partnerships at UC Santa Barbara.

"We are deeply grateful to Marc and Lynne Benioff for their extraordinary generosity," said UC Santa Barbara Chancellor Henry Yang. "This transformative gift establishing the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory underscores the Benioffs' continuing commitment to marine science research that seeks to address the most pressing ocean environmental issues of our time. The laboratory builds on the achievements of the Benioff Ocean Initiative, whose groundbreaking research under the direction of Professor Douglas McCauley has expanded our knowledge and understanding of marine ecosystems and promoted innovative solutions to the concerns facing our world's oceans.

"We greatly appreciate Marc and Lynne's unwavering dedication to environmental conservation, and we are honored by their partnership with UC Santa Barbara on the

Benioff Ocean Initiative and the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory," Yang continued. "It is a testament to the faith and confidence they have in our campus."

The bulk of this transformative philanthropy, $50 million, will go toward expanding the important work of the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory (formerly the Benioff Ocean Initiative). The remaining $10 million will be invested to upgrade and renovate the university's Marine Biotechnology Lab, a premier ocean research facility overlooking Campus Point. The building will be renamed for the Benioffs, to honor their commitment to ocean science.

"Around the world, our ocean and the millions of species that inhabit it, as well as the billions of people who depend upon a healthy ocean, are in danger. The escalating damage to our ocean from climate change and other threats cannot be the legacy we pass along to future generations," said Marc Benioff. "Lynne and I are so thankful we are able to support the incredible marine science community at UC Santa Barbara and the collaborations they've forged with ocean scientists internationally to develop the innovative solutions needed to help bring our oceans and planet back to health."

With a gift of $10 million, the Benioffs in 2016 created the Benioff Ocean Initiative at UC Santa Barbara — an effort that has since grown into a globally respected model for using science to collaboratively solve the world's most pressing ocean problems and replicate these successes.

And successes there have been.

The newly renamed Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory group partnered with researchers worldwide on Whale Safe, California's first automated whale detection system. Meant to prevent whale-ship collisions — a leading threat to endangered whale population recovery — the system is powered by artificial intelligence, whale occurrence data and satellite data. Whale Safe was piloted in the Santa Barbara Channel. The Benioff Oceans team today announced the launch of an expansion system off the coast of San Francisco to help reduce whale deaths in the Bay Area.

In addition, the scientists have teamed with communities across the globe in the Clean Currents Coalition to pioneer new methods for arresting plastic pollution in the ocean by capturing it first in rivers. Teams in Ecuador, Jamaica, Kenya, Mexico, Panama, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia have developed technologies to intercept more than 2 million pounds of plastic waste and divert the majority of it to be

repurposed or recycled. A semiautonomous interceptor known as a “trash wheel” has just been launched in Panama — a milestone in the global fight against plastic pollution.

“I applaud the Benioffs’ gift to UC Santa Barbara,” said Ambassador Peter Thomson, the UN’s Special Envoy for the Ocean. “It represents a great contribution in support of the UN Decade of Ocean Science. I look forward to the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory providing the good science we need for the healthy ocean we want.”

The Benioff Oceans group also has developed new tools for detecting sharks using drones to promote coexistence of people and sharks; harnessed the power of ocean big data to help set up new protected areas in the ocean and strategically manage the high seas; and used science to promote awareness of how new industrial activities, like ocean mining, could negatively affect ocean health.

With a key mandate to promote diversity in ocean science and in ocean solution-making, the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory provides paid internships for UC Santa Barbara undergraduate students from Black, Indigenous, Hispanic and other underrepresented communities, partnering on ocean outreach and training programs, and supporting research on environmental justice in the ocean.

Next up? The laboratory is in the planning stage for a $10 million challenge to contribute to global efforts to stop the advance of climate change. The formal launch of this new climate project, and more details on the effort, will be released next year.

“I’m proud of all that our team has been able to achieve thus far at UC Santa Barbara. But the most important work is ahead,” said McCauley, the laboratory’s director. “The Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory is excited to dedicate the full power of UC Santa Barbara science to the urgent fight against climate change. Not only does the ocean depend on winning the climate battle — we all do.”

Much of that work will surely take place in what today is known as the Marine Biotechnology Lab Building, which for decades has served as an epicenter for marine research at UC Santa Barbara, and hosted researchers and students from across campus. Scientists based there have contributed to major discoveries, including advances in materials science inspired by abalone, squid and other marine species; leading research on how carbon and silicon cycle in the ocean; the innovation of new plastics that will degrade in the sea; and promising new methods for sucking more

CO_2 from the air and storing it in the ocean to slow climate change.

These facilities will be modernized and vastly improved thanks to the Benioffs, whose gift marks an unprecedented investment in the future of ocean science at UC Santa Barbara. In recognition of their legacy commitment — and in their honor — the building also will be renamed Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory.

“This transformative gift will build on the existing success of the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory team, support cutting-edge research and technological advances that will help us both better understand our marine environments, and apply actionable solutions to the problems they face,” said Pierre Wiltzius, Susan and Bruce Worster Dean of Science at UC Santa Barbara. “With the extraordinary vision and generosity of the Benioffs, UC Santa Barbara has strengthened its status as one of the leading marine research institutions on the west coast.”

Take a deeper dive into the work and accomplishments of the Benioff Ocean Science Laboratory here.

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About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.