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Music Comes to the Coast for Littoral Society Members Day

Sandy Hook, NJ -- Sandy Hook came alive with the sound of music for the American Littoral Society's annual Members Day on Saturday, June 11, 2016.

The Society's annual meeting is a traditional day of celebration and thanks to members for their support over the past 50 years. The event took place at Littoral Society headquarters, 18 Hartshorne Drive in Gateway National Recreation Area's Sandy Hook unit with close to 250 people in attendance.

Members Day activities traditionally include seining in the bay, a walk through Sandy Hook's Holly Forest, and birding excursions. But this year, the gathering featured a collaboration with the award-winning Union City Music Project (UMCP).

The UMCP provided a special musical performance to Society members and guests. In return, the students and their parents shared in the Society's other planned outdoor activities. For some UMCP students and parents this was the first time they had ever been to the ocean.

The collaboration between the American Littoral Society and Union City Music Project has been made possible by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. Both organizations are Dodge Foundation grantees and the coastal concert provides a way for them to pursue their missions in new ways.

"We are thrilled that this partnership was formed as a follow-up to a recent Dodge's grantee convening. We believe that building relationships, making

connections and working together, particularly across program areas and among non-traditional partners, are keys to greater impact." Chris Daggett, President, Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

The event was supported by the National Park Service in conjunction with NPS Centennial celebration.

The Union City Music Project is a child development non-profit organization that uses music as a vehicle for social change by providing students with intensive after-school orchestral instruction, mentoring, and academic tutoring. It is based on El Sistema, the Venezuelan music education model that has a 37-year-history of helping children and their families foster a sense of ambition and achievement.

The UCMP goes far beyond just teaching music scales. The project promotes fundamental life skills such as self-esteem, self-expression, cooperative learning, discipline, and creativity by teaching music in an orchestral setting to students who range in age from four to 15. UCMP participants receive free musical instruction and instruments, and have the opportunity to attend a full range of cultural, social, and enrichment experiences for an annual participation fee, such as their visit to Sandy Hook.

The impact of the music program on participating families has been powerful, according to Melina Garcia, UCMP founder and Executive Director.

"One mother cried, saying she never had the opportunity to take her kids outside of Union City because she didn't have a car. She was so touched, and so moved," said Garcia.

The American Littoral Society has empowered people to care for the coast through advocacy, conservation, and education since 1961. The Society believes that helping people to get their feet wet and hands sandy will lead them to become stewards of the shore. Sitting at a computer or reading a book may cause people to develop an interest in the coast; but standing knee deep in sea foam with sand between their toes will cause them to develop a passion for the coast. Such public sentiment will encourage local, state and national leaders to support initiatives that protect the environment and maintain natural resources.

"We believe this is a remarkable opportunity to share beautiful music with our members and the beauty of the coast with the parents and children of the Union City Music Project," said Tim Dillingham, Executive Director for the Littoral Society. "We hope the combination will foster greater passion to protect and preserve our natural treasures -- like the songs of shorebirds and seals, as well as the places those creatures need to survive and thrive."

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For more information about the American Littoral Society or to become a

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