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Dan Pingaro: sailor, ocean advocate, and Community Foundation's captain for non-profits

By MAGGI HENRIKSON

Photos by Mary Hurlbut

Dan Pingaro is the captain at the helm of Laguna Beach Community Foundation. But it's not the first time he's been a captain.



Dan Pingaro, Executive Director of Laguna Beach Community Foundation

Before arriving on Laguna's shores, Pingaro was Chief Executive Officer of Sailors for the Sea, a conservation organization that "inspires and activates the sailing and boating community toward healing the ocean."

Founded by David Rockefeller, Sailors for the Sea began as a local east coast organization with zero programs or staff. Pingaro, as the first CEO, grew it into a global concern, creating four affiliate offices on three continents, multiple partnership programs such as the America's Cup, and creating a diversified funding base. Ultimately, Sailors for the Sea is a way to contribute and create a legacy of change to effectively address environmental threats to the ocean.

Pingaro has had a life-long love for the ocean. He was a county lifeguard at Aliso Beach as a teenager, and fondly remembers fellow lifeguard and PMMC co-founder, Jim Stauffer, and many fun times in Laguna. "Really good memories of going to The Stand for lunch!" he laughs.



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The ocean, his other “office”

Early in his career he created a foul-weather apparel and gear company for sailors, hikers and climbers, called ClewGear. “It was technical and fashion. We sourced materials and manufactured everything in the US,” said Pingaro.

“With unique, functional components, it’s the best of its class – to this day,” he says proudly.

He met his wife, Kim, on the water too, as they both enjoy sailboat racing. They moved here from Mill Valley. Now, after almost two years of living in Laguna, they both enjoy the weather better than up north, and they like to spend time on the water – surfing, sailing or swimming, when they can.

Navigating his way to Laguna

After his mom died, Pingaro was hoping for an opportunity to live closer to his dad in Orange County to be able to help him out. He still thought of Laguna and had kept up with the goings on in here through his friendship with Greg McGillivray, and their ocean

conservation work. When the position with Laguna Beach Community Foundation opened up, Pingaro was the right guy at the right time.

His dedication to the environment and pursuit of global sustainability together with his aptitude for fundraising and investment strategies has made him a natural fit for the LBCF, whose goal is to provide strategic philanthropy advice.

Prior to his position with Sailors for the Sea, Pingaro had spent ten years with the US Environmental Protection Agency, in San Francisco. He was responsible for grants and financial management, environmental planning and program development. He was on the America's Cup Sustainability subcommittee, and was the first recipient of the Surfrider Foundation's Thomas Pratte Memorial Scholarship. Pingaro brings this background to the forefront at LBCF, where he oversees this non-profit for non-profits.

Laguna Beach Community Foundation gives back

"Our Board and Investment Committee are entirely volunteer, so we are a non-profit helping other non-profits, and advising at a very low cost," Pingaro explains.

Since he's been on board, funds and fund holders have increased significantly.

"It's been great to have the opportunity to grow an organization," he says. "The communications committee, the board, the staff – all do a great job."



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Pingaro's "official" office at LBCF

LBCF offers expertise on planned giving, plus a free speaker series every third Thursday of the month. Anyone may attend but space is limited to 25. The January speaker, for example, is Ed Fuller, former president and managing director of Marriott International, current president and CEO of the Orange County Visitors Association, and president/co-founder of Laguna Strategic Advisors.

In February the LBCF series will feature a grant writing seminar.

"It's crazy – it's free!" enthuses Pingaro. "And it includes free lunch."

The series is for non-profits to better market themselves or to learn about other local and global opportunities to give them a leg up. The LBCF also publishes a newsletter full of advice and strategies that anyone can sign up for at: www.lagunabeachcf.org

Time, Treasure and Talent

"It's surprised me how much of a village community there is here, with an incredible number of non-profits," said Pingaro. "The philanthropy has surprised me in a positive way."

He relishes the number of programs that Laguna is lucky enough to support, such as arts, the environment, and human health – as evidenced by a good cross-section of its non-profits. LBCF will steer individuals, families, and other group investors toward the non-profit that speaks to their desires, and will endure as a legacy. Any non-profit can take advantage of LBCF's national grants database for free. They can also match up individual volunteers with specific goals.

"We're the hub to learn about the non-profits," he says. "We're here to support you and your community." The LBCF motto is: People give Time, Treasure or Talent.

Having settled into Laguna as home, Dan Pingaro is just steps from his house to his office to the beach. He realizes it doesn't get much better than that.

From an ocean conservation standpoint, he's noticed the waters off Laguna have more fish now than he remembers in the past.

And from a philanthropy point of view, he's found there are plenty of fish in Laguna's sea of generosity.

