



Pictured at La Jolla Music Society's SummerFest gala on Aug. 9 in Rancho Santa Fe are Irwin and Joan Jacobs with Debbie Turner and Conrad Prebys. (Photo by Vincent Andrunas)

## La Jolla Music Society to name planned Fay Avenue complex the 'Conrad Prebys Performing Arts Center'

BY JAMES CHUTE  
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The La Jolla Music Society has raised \$50 million to fund the construction of a new performing arts complex, which will be named the Conrad Prebys Performing Arts Center. With the year-long "silent phase" of the capital campaign completed, the Music Society is launching a public effort to raise an additional \$10 million for an endowment to help support programming at the center, the society announced Saturday at its SummerFest gala.

Construction of the new center on Fay Avenue is expected to begin in late 2016 and be completed by October 2017. The fund drive will continue through the Music Society's 50th anniversary season in 2018-2019.

"I can't tell you how excited I am," said Prebys, who was the campaign's most generous donor, giving \$15 million toward the construction of the center. Because of his philanthropy, Prebys' name has become ubiquitous in San Diego, from the Conrad Prebys Elephant Care Center at the San Diego Zoo to the Conrad Prebys Theatre Center at The Old Globe.

"When the Music Society opportunity presented itself, I think I took five minutes to make the decision," Prebys said. "I consider it my pride and joy."

The La Jolla Music Society purchased a 30,760-square-foot parcel of land at 7600 Fay Ave. (between Pearl and Kline streets) in late May for an undisclosed price. Last week, it

announced the Cambridge, Mass.-based firm of Epstein Joslin Architects will design the center, which is anchored by a 500-seat concert hall and includes a 150-seat cabaret/multipurpose space.

"I have great faith in the architects and we were familiar with their music hall in Rockport (the Shalin Liu Performance Center in Massachusetts)," said Brenda Baker, a longtime La Jolla Music Society board member and former board chair, who with her husband Steve Baum, donated \$10 million toward the center.

"Shalin Liu is a unique facility. The design is absolutely perfect for that spot, it has beautiful acoustics, and it's both comfortable and surprising, which is what we hope for the building here."

In all, 11 donors (or donor families) accounted for the \$50 million, with "lead gifts" from Joan and Irwin Jacobs (\$10 million), Raffaella and John Belanich (\$5 million), Baker and Baum, and Prebys.

The La Jolla Music Society, with an operating budget of approximately \$4.1 million, is San Diego's principal presenter of touring performing artists. Unlike the symphony, it does not have its own ensemble. Its motto is "we bring the world to San Diego," referring to the musicians and dance companies who offer concerts under the Music Society's sponsorship at venues around town, but primarily at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego's Sherwood Auditorium in La Jolla.

Although building its own concert hall had been seriously discussed at least twice by the board in the Music Society's 47-year history, it was only with the Museum of Contemporary Art's announcement of long-range plans to renovate and expand its campus and convert Sherwood Auditorium into gallery space that the society was forced to act.

"This is probably the world's record for fundraising (in terms of raising a large amount of money in a relatively short time)," Baker said. "And it's because, first of all, it had to happen; we didn't really have a choice. And secondly, there's no time like the present. Don't delay; costs go up, everything goes up. So let's get it done. And a number of people simultaneously felt that way."

Prebys said he and LJMS artistic director Christopher Beach visited two other sites in La Jolla before deciding on the Fay Street location, which will also house the Music Society's administrative offices and box office.

"Two of them didn't do it," said Prebys. "And then we saw this one and it was a matter of seconds before I said, that's it, that's the one. I've been in real estate ever since I've been in San Diego, so I can recognize real estate by this time. I think it's perfect. It's just the perfect location, and I think it will be something very, very special for San Diego."

Prebys is president of Progress Construction and Management, which he helped form soon after moving to San Diego in 1965. He (with his company and trust) is now one of the county's largest land owners, with dozens of properties, many of them apartment buildings. But when he was younger, he thought he might be a musician.

A 2012 analysis by *Business Insider*, based on data from the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, named Prebys the 24th most generous person in America, estimating that he donated \$63.1 million in 2011 and had a net worth of \$125 million.

He was just behind Joan and Irwin Jacobs, who ranked 22nd with 2011 donations of \$64.9 million and a net worth estimated at \$1.15 billion.

His causes have ranged from Scripps Health (\$45 million for a new cardiovascular institute) to San Diego State University (\$20 million which resulted in the new student union being named in his honor).

But he says this one is especially close to his heart, and he will have more of a hands-on role in the project's "nuts and bolts" than in his other endeavors.

"Music is everything for me. Everything," said Prebys, who grew up in South Bend, Ind. and attended Indiana University. "For me, music is experiencing the sublime. I live every day with music around me, whether it's in my car, whether it's at home... So it's extremely important."

(Additional donations of more than \$1 million were received from Rita and Richard Atkinson, The Beyster Family, Silvija and Brian Devine, Joy Frieman, Peter and Peggy Preuss, Clara Wu and Joseph Tsai, and an anonymous donor.)