



For Immediate Release

Contact: Brooke Christopher  
(310) 498-9598  
bchristopher@treepeople.org



## **\$1 Million Legacy Gift Announced at TreePeople’s Annual Gala: Anonymous Donor Creates the Andy Lipkis and Laurie Benenson Fund**

-----

**LOS ANGELES, September 29, 2014** – TreePeople’s annual gala, **An Evening Under the Harvest Moon** hosted 450 guests at TreePeople headquarters in Beverly Hills on Saturday night, September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The evening was emceed by Warren Olney, award- winning veteran broadcast journalist and host of KCRW’s “Which Way, LA?” The sold-out event raised \$400,000 for TreePeople’s ongoing work to create a sustainable Los Angeles. It was also the venue for a surprise announcement of a legacy gift.

The gift announcement came after honoring **Laurie Benenson**, journalist, activist and TreePeople Board Member. Benenson was presented the Evergreen Award in recognition of her long-term commitment to healing the environment and using her resources to help create a sustainable future for Los Angeles. Among other film credits, Benenson acted as Executive Producer of *Dirt! The Movie*, directed by husband Bill Benenson and Gene Rosow, which was an examination of the crucial role that soil plays in the health of our world. The film featured TreePeople founder Andy Lipkis among other environmental leaders. Upon accepting the award, Ms. Benenson recounted sharing TreePeople’s vision for a water-resilient city with President Obama this year. This has resulted in an invitation to the White House for Lipkis, who will be flying to Washington DC next month.

Immediately after this award was presented, Bill Benenson came to the stage with the unexpected announcement that an anonymous donor had pledged an estate gift to support TreePeople, to be called the Andy Lipkis and Laurie Benenson Fund. TreePeople Board of Directors Chair, Ira Ziering expounds, “I am thrilled that TreePeople has received a Legacy gift of one million dollars (\$1,000,000) in honor of our board member Laurie Benenson and our founder Andy Lipkis. The gift is remarkable both in its generosity and because the donor has asked to remain anonymous. It is a wonderful recognition of our 40 years of success and of the unique role we are playing right now in the creation of a greener, healthier and more sustainable

Los Angeles. As TreePeople continues to build capacity and support, this milestone gift gives us not only a stronger financial footing but also a validation that our message of citizen activated change is more vital than ever."

"This is a tremendous validation of the value of our work over the last 40 years," says Lipkis. "It is a powerful endorsement of our commitment to accelerate making Los Angeles a climate-resilient city."

Other event honorees included **Main Street Elementary School**, an urban school of 900 low-income students, which received the Barbara Goldenberg Volunteer Award for leadership among staff, parents and the community to transform 4,000 square feet of asphalt on its campus into a thriving, sustainable urban forest. **Dr. Jonathan Fielding**, retired, Director and Health Officer of Los Angeles County Department of Public Health was presented the Partner in Community Award presented by California Senator Fran Pavley, which honored his work to heal our region through strategic leadership, working with TreePeople and other stakeholders to create a climate-resilient Los Angeles.

The program concluded with an interview of Andy Lipkis by Warren Olney, focusing on what Los Angeles can do to respond to the current drought as well as long-term climate change. Lipkis described TreePeople's vision of a city that captures rainwater as a resource, rather than throws it away through storm drains. To Olney's question, "Why would we depend on capturing rain when it isn't raining?" Lipkis responded, "It is raining. Last year, during the driest year in California's recorded history, it rained 3.6 inches in Los Angeles. That tiny bit of rainfall generated 28 billion gallons of runoff from the city. That's enough water to provide 6,500 gallons to each of the 4 million people in Los Angeles had it been captured in cisterns, swales, and aquifer recharge facilities." Lipkis described a policy delegation he will be leading in October to cities in Australia, a country that endured a historic drought for more than ten years by implementing many of the solutions that TreePeople champions in LA.

Whether it is planting trees, transforming landscapes to conserve water, or capturing the rain that falls," Lipkis concluded, "the future of Los Angeles is in our hands."

# # #

### **About TreePeople**

Celebrating its 40th anniversary in 2013, TreePeople's mission is to inspire, engage and support people to take personal responsibility for the urban environment, making it healthy, fun, safe and sustainable – and to share the process as a model for the world. For more than a decade TreePeople has been a recognized leader in integrated urban watershed management in the L.A. region. Our focus is on managing rainwater by incorporating green, nature-based infrastructure into urban areas. We are demonstrating that this approach yields numerous environmental, social and economic benefits, while helping eliminate waste and duplication. TreePeople has recently launched a 10-year vision to help the Los Angeles region achieve a tipping point toward climate resilience and sustainable water supplies.