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February 17, 2009

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Imagination Park Takes Vision *and* Volunteers

30-acre park for special needs children gets help from SLO County officials

SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA—In an unprecedented showing of volunteer support for a nonprofit agency, 10 of this county's most respected archeological consultants donated time last month to survey a 30-acre parcel of land in Nipomo for a very special park.

"We truly could not believe how many of them showed up," said Fran Tognazzini of Jack's Helping Hand (JHH). "I can assure you we were thrilled!"

Plans for the first and only universally accessible park for special needs children between San Francisco and Los Angeles are now under way. Donated to the County by Nick and Kathy Tompkins, the 30 acres in Nipomo near Guadalupe will soon become the Jack Ready Imagination Park, named for a three-year-old boy who lost his life to brain cancer in 2003. Shortly after Jack's death, his parents, Paul and Bridget Ready, established Jack's Helping Hand, Inc. a nonprofit agency that helps children like Jack to get the special equipment and services they need that insurance does not cover.

The park will include a special playground, therapeutic riding facility, basketball courts, playing fields, accessible hiking trails, bridal paths, and picnic areas. Jack's Helping Hand intends to facilitate special events each month for children, their families and friends.

Ron Rose, of Cultural Resource Management Services spread the word to his colleagues about the need for county talent that could survey and prepare the donated land so that plans for the park could move forward. Among them were: Kate Ballantyne of the SLO County Department of Public Works; Ethan Bertrando of Cuesta College and Camp San Luis Obispo; Nancy Farrell, Ron Rose and Todd Hannahs of Cultural Resource Management Services; Sebastian Garza, freelance archeologist; Jack Hunter and Wayne Mills of CalTrans SLO; Leroy Laurie of URS Corp; and Marc Linder of Applied Earthworks.

"There would have been even more," said Rose, "if they hadn't been working on other projects at the time."

Jack's Helping Hand fills qualified requests for financial assistance with treatment, equipment, and transportation that exceed a family's ability to pay. In addition, the agency has opened the Jack Ready

Memorial Therapy Room at California Children's Services, created the special needs Toy Lending Library at Central Coast Gymnastics, and established an ongoing support group for parents of children with cancer at French Hospital.

"The Jack Ready Imagination Park is a dream come true," said Bridget Ready. "We are so very grateful to all those who have given their time and expertise in order to make this park happen. We believe it will extend the health and happiness of all children, especially those with special needs."

For more information about Jack's Helping Hand, call (805) 547-1914 or log onto www.jackshelpinghand.org.

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