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PHILANTHROPY

Eateries plan fundraiser to aid Australia relief

To help in the rescue and preservation of wildlife endangered by raging wildfires in Australia, two San Diego restaurant groups will be holding a countywide fundraising effort on Monday.

OMG Hospitality Group will donate 25 percent of all sales on Monday at its five restaurants, and City Tacos will donate 10 percent of all sales at its four restaurants, to the Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service. WIREs is the largest wildlife rescue and rehabilitation charity in Australia, providing aid for all native Australian animals.

Some wildlife officials in Australia have estimated that more than a billion animals have died in the conflagration and many millions more that survived the blazes will perish from thirst and starvation if not rescued.

The leaders of City Tacos and OMG have a personal interest in Australia and its wildlife, so they were moved to launch the fundraiser.

Eric Leitstein, the founder and CEO of OMG Hospitality, and his wife, Teresa, have a daughter who lives and attends college in Australia.

"We strive to be active members and leaders of our local community, but we also feel a responsibility to support this cause due to the sheer magnitude of the devastation," Chris Cox, chief operating officer for OMG, said in a statement. "This is a disaster on a global scale where so many people and animals have been affected by this disaster, and we just want to do our small part."

OMG Hospitality owns Union Kitchen and Tap in Encinitas, Union Kitchen and Tap in the Gaslamp, and three locations in Pacific Beach: Pacific Beach AleHouse, Backyard Kitchen and Tap and Waterbar.

Gerry Torres, who owns City Tacos locations in North Park, La Mesa, Imperial Beach and Encinitas, said his family also has a connection with Australia.

"My daughter studied abroad in Melbourne, and my family and I recently vacationed in Australia where I had the opportunity to hold a koala and experience this beautiful continent firsthand," Torres said. "We were fortunate to meet some really great people, and we truly fell in love with Australia, so I'm very proud to show support in any way we can."

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