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Comic Relief Supports Local Nonprofit New Beginnings Counseling Center

(SANTA BARBARA, Calif.)— New Beginnings Counseling Center is kicking off a new annual fundraising effort this May – Comic Relief Santa Barbara. “We are very excited to be launching a fresh and engaging approach to raising funds to solve some very serious local issues,” announced Diane Pannkuk, President, Board of Directors, New Beginnings Counseling Center. The event will be held on May 8th at Soho Restaurant and Music Club, at 1221 State St. in Santa Barbara. Three of LA’s best known comedians, Greg Otto, Karen Rontowski, and Cary Odes, will perform in two shows at 6pm and 9pm.

The agency, which provides mental health counseling, housing case management, and safe overnight parking for the homeless living in their vehicles, sees this event as an opportunity for attendees to “experience the healing power of laughter. So much of our work is spent helping people who have significant challenges in their lives. Laughter is often a defense mechanism used to lighten and defuse a tense or sad situation,” shared New Beginnings’ Executive Director Kristine Schwarz. “Experiencing a good belly laugh, or being able to find humor in some of the more challenging situations in our lives often helps us to develop the capacity to endure traumatic events and eventually move through them.”

The event is fashioned after the improv stage founded in New York in 1963 by Broadway producer Budd Friedman. The iconic red brick wall – originally left behind by the previous Vietnamese restaurant tenants – gave the club its signature and stage time to such comedic legends as Lily Tomlin, George Carlin, Jerry Seinfeld, Rodney Dangerfield, Richard Pryor, Andy Kaufman, and the list goes on. The use of “Comic Relief” as a means to raise money to change lives began most notably in the UK and Africa in 1985 and in Los Angeles to raise funds to help those in need in 1986.

The inaugural event in Santa Barbara will feature three headliners: Greg Otto, Karen Rontowski and Cary Odes. “It’s a delight to bring together some of the funniest people I know for such a great cause,” said Cary Odes, whose television credits include *Melrose Place* and *Touched By An Angel*. Odes studied at SecondCity with improv legend Del Close and then toured the country doing stand-up for more than ten years. Odes now runs The Standup Workshop in LA. For more than 30 years, Greg Otto has appeared all over the world in 60 countries on five continents entertaining at venues such as the Mirage, MGMGrand, and the Comedy Store. Otto has appeared on many television shows including *Evening at the Improv*, *Comedy Central*, *A&E*, *Showtime*, and *Newhart* and has shared the stage with Chris Rock, Adam Sandler, Dennis Miller, Jerry Seinfeld, and many others. From the *Late Show* with David Letterman to *Sirius Satellite Radio*, Karen Rontowski has a stand-up career that spans over 20 years and includes performances on *Comedy Central*, *Live at Gotham*, *The Late Show*



with David Letterman, and Comics Unleashed. Rontowski has opened for such show biz legends as Bob Hope, Ray Charles and David Brenner and she is a regular on the Bob and Tom Radio Show. Press, tickets and sponsorship information can be found at www.sbnbcc.org/comic-relief or by calling 805.963.7777 x 104. New Beginnings is a 501(c)(3) organization. For federal income tax purposes, attendees can deduct as a charitable contribution the price of this ticket less its fair market value.

New Beginnings Counseling Center provides quality, affordable counseling, shelter, case management and education that strengthens our community and provides our clients with the ability to lead healthy and productive lives. New Beginnings Counseling Center, located at 324 East Carrillo Street, Suite C, Santa Barbara, CA 93101, (805) 963-7777, is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. For more information or to make a donation, visit www.sbnbcc.org.

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