FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dr. Todd Michael, Renowned Plant Genomics Researcher, Appointed Chief Science Officer at San Diego Botanic Garden

ENCINITAS, Calif. (June 2025) – San Diego Botanic Garden (SDBG) welcomes Dr. Todd P. Michael, Ph.D., as its new Chief Science Officer. An internationally recognized leader in plant genomics and computational biology, Michael will lead the Garden's scientific research and conservation efforts with a focus on biodiversity, medicinal plant discovery, and climate-resilient botany.

Michael joins SDBG with over 20 years of experience in both academic and applied plant science. A respected expert in his field, he also serves as Research Professor at Salk Institute for Biological Studies where he contributes to the Harnessing Plants Initiative — an ambitious effort to develop crops that capture more atmospheric carbon through enhanced root systems, ultimately helping to mitigate climate change while producing more food, fuel, and fiber for a growing global population. His new appointment reflects the Garden's growing leadership at the intersection of horticulture, environmental sustainability, and genomic science.

"Todd has been a Research Associate with us for the last several years," said Ari Novy, Ph.D., President and CEO of San Diego Botanic Garden. "I'm excited for Todd to leverage his extensive research and management experience to support our continued momentum in science and conservation. In addition to his new role with the Garden, Todd will retain his position with Salk Institute which will allow for our two organizations to continue working closely to elucidate the wonders of plants."

Since founding its science and conservation department in 2019, SDBG has become recognized as a premier institution for botanic science and conservation with more than 30 active projects regionally and across the globe. Michael's collaborative research with the Garden has been ongoing for years, bringing innovative research to the Garden's medicinal plant collection. In his new role Micahel will lead the Garden's science and conservation projects both within the Garden and beyond its 37 acres, focusing on native plant conservation and restoration, food & agricultural plants, and medicinal plants.

"Botanical gardens have historically been places where the public can experience, learn about, and enjoy the beauty and diversity of plants," says Michael. "Science has always been part of that mission, but today we have an opportunity to reimagine botanical gardens as living

laboratories, places where cutting-edge genomic research, conservation, and public engagement intersect to tackle some of the most pressing challenges in climate resilience, biodiversity, and sustainable agriculture." Michael earned his Ph.D. in Molecular and Cellular Biology from Dartmouth College and a BA in Biology from the University of Virginia. He previously served as Professor and Director of Informatics at the J. Craig Venter Institute in La Jolla. His career spans leadership roles in both academia and industry, including Director of Genomics at Abbott Laboratories, Head of the Genome Analysis Center at Monsanto, and Assistant Professor at the Waksman Institute of Microbiology at Rutgers University. In addition to his scientific work, Michael is deeply committed to education — earlier in his career, he taught high school biology, physics, and calculus, experiences that continue to shape his approach to mentorship and science communication. He has received numerous honors, including being named one of Genome Technology's "Tomorrow's PIs" in 2008 and receiving the 2003 Hannah Croasdale Award for Outstanding Graduate Research.

Michael's appointment underscores SDBG's commitment to advancing plant science and conservation. His leadership is poised to enhance the Garden's role as a hub for environmental education, scientific research, and community engagement.

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About San Diego Botanic Garden
Established in 1970, San Diego Botanic Garden (SDBG) is an urban oasis located in Encinitas, California, just north of San Diego. The Garden's 37-acres and 8,000 square foot glass conservatory display more than 5,300 plant species and varieties. As a premier 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization for botanical science and conservation, SDBG is involved in conservation horticulture, botany, and applied plant sciences to address our biggest local and global challenges, from biodiversity loss to climate change, food insecurity to environmental degradation. Featuring four miles of trails, SDBG has the largest public bamboo collection in North America; gardens representing different regions and flora of the world; and demonstration gardens showcasing fruits and vegetables, water-smart ornamentals, and native plants. Through an array of educational programming, events and activities for both children and adults, the Garden aims to create, share and apply plant wisdom to the world. Learn more at sdbg.org. | FB @SDBotanicGarden | Instagram @sandiegobotanicgarden | TikTok @sandiegobotanicgarden | LinkedIn @SanDiegoBotanicGarden | Twitter @SDBGarden

About Todd Michael, Ph.D.
Todd fell in love with the diversity of plants back in the seventh grade after doing a leaf collecting project. He decided he wanted to understand the underlying code making plants so interesting, so he set off on a journey to sequence plant genomes. His lab at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies focuses on just that – sequencing and analyzing plant genomes. At the Salk Institute his group is part of the Harnessing Plant Initiative (HPI) that aims to develop crop plants that sequester more carbon via extensive root systems containing recalcitrant carbon polymers to fight climate change. In partnership with SDBG, Todd is continuing to explore the diversity of plant genomes with a focus on developing resources to preserve rare, medicinal, and regionally

important plants. Todd received his PhD from Dartmouth College, and BA from the University of Virginia.