



## **San Diego Philanthropist Completes 21-Mile Swim with Fourth Fastest Time in the World, Raising Money for Monarch School and the Great Friends Foundation**

*Blair Cannon Enters Dark Waters for Sanctioned Swim, Sharing in the Vulnerability of San Diego's At-Risk Youth*

**SAN DIEGO – Aug. 16, 2011** – Blair Cannon, a philanthropist and vice president of Bernstein Global Wealth Management in San Diego, set out to complete a 21-mile swim across the Catalina Channel Friday, Aug. 5, to raise money for charity and show at-risk youth that they can accomplish anything they set their minds to. Cannon took on the challenge with only six months to train for the grueling swim that fewer than 200 people have successfully completed solo. He not only successfully crossed the Channel, but he did it with flair, earning the fourth fastest time in the world.

The drama of the event unfolded live on the Scott and BR Show on XX1090 as tens of thousands of listeners in San Diego and Los Angeles tuned in to follow Blair's progress from Catalina Island to Palos Verdes as he was on pace to break the world record with one hour to go. Unfortunately, the conditions changed and the pace slowed. Still, Blair was still among the fastest of all time, clocking in at eight hours, 18 minutes and 27 seconds.

Nicknamed the "Cannon Catalina Challenge," the swim benefited Monarch School, the San Diego-based public K-12 school for children impacted by homelessness, and the Great Friends Foundation Scholarship Program for children of the military in San Diego.

"The children at Monarch and those supported by the Great Friends Foundation face so many challenges every day," said Cannon. "I did this to raise money and awareness, but to also set an example for these kids that anything is possible if they work hard enough and stay committed to their goals."

Officially sanctioned by the Catalina Channel Swimming Federation, Cannon was not allowed to make any supporting contact during the swim, to any other person or object. In addition, and despite swimming in 60 degree water, he was not allowed to wear a wetsuit or other gear designed to either retain body heat or aid in buoyancy. He faced other challenges in the shark-infested water, including numerous jellyfish stings and difficulties staying hydrated and well-nourished throughout the swim.

Cannon, a member of the Board of Directors of the Great Friends Foundation, was first introduced to Monarch School in the fall of 2010 and was immediately inspired to help San Diego's growing homeless youth population. A competitive swimmer since the age of five, Cannon decided to challenge himself to the 21-mile swim on behalf of the Great Friends Foundation's Scholarship Program and Monarch School. His coach, world-class open water swimmer and 2010 inductee into the International Marathon Swimming Hall of Fame, Anne Cleveland, suggested he spend 18 months preparing for the swim, but Cannon took the plunge after just six months of training.

"Blair's record-breaking time is a testament that, just like him, the children of Monarch School and the Great Friends Foundation can do anything if they put in the hard work," said Cleveland, who successfully crossed Catalina Channel in 2001, as well as previously championing the Maui and English Channels and several other open-water milestones. "The Catalina Channel is one of the most difficult routes and a real challenge for any

swimmer, but Blair was determined to take this on in order to raise money and awareness for these great organizations.”

Fundraising efforts supporting Cannon’s swim raised more than \$110,000 and concluded with a celebratory party Friday, Aug. 12. Donations are still being accepted at <http://www.monarchschoools.org/news-events/events-list/cannon-catalina-challenge>. Fans can also witness the momentous swim themselves through a short documentary put together by the Scott and BR Show, which can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FgiznY1Q4Tw>.

Photos from Cannon’s swim and the after party are available on request and may be made to Jo-Anne Chase at (919) 881-7922 or [jo-anne@boltpr.com](mailto:jo-anne@boltpr.com).

**About Monarch School:**

Founded in 1988, Monarch School, located in downtown San Diego, is a public K-12 school exclusively for students who are at-risk and impacted by homelessness. Monarch School represents a unique public-private partnership between the San Diego County Office of Education and the Monarch School Project, a non-profit 501(c)3 organization. Today, more than 175 students between the ages of four and 19 are enrolled. Monarch School’s committed team of educators, support staff and volunteers is dedicated to providing homeless and at-risk children with an accredited education while caring for their basic needs. Monarch School will break ground on its new campus in downtown San Diego in fall 2011. For more information, visit <http://monarchschoools.org> or call (619) 685-8242, ext. 227.

**About the Great Friends Foundation Scholarship Program:**

The Great Friends Foundation Scholarship Program identifies and honors high school seniors of the military in San Diego County. These students excel in leadership, academics, and community service. For more information please visit [www.thegff.org](http://www.thegff.org).