

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

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For Immediate Release

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Tulare County Office of Education Announces: SCICON's 50th Anniversary Commemorated at Annual Barbecue

Sunday, April 20, 2008 · 11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

The SCICON program is planning a 50th anniversary celebration to coincide with its annual Barbecue and Wildflower Festival scheduled for Sunday, April 20 from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Over the next few weeks, the Tulare County Office of Education will share pieces of SCICON's history, describing how it has developed into one of the finest outdoor education programs in the nation.

50 Year History of SCICON (Part III)

In Parts I & II of SCICON'S history, it was noted that Charles Rich, county schools science coordinator, and past Tulare County Superintendents J. Post Williams and Max Cochran helped SCICON begin a prototype program at Camp Tulequoia (a Y.M.C.A. facility) in 1958 and then move it to the Springville campus with a donation of 35 acres from Clemmie Gill. By 1973, all of the student cabins (built by various communities and school districts) had been completed, as well as the Porterville Learning Center, a large educational complex built by the Porterville community. But now a new challenge presented itself to the SCICON program.

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Acres for SCICON

(The following has been taken from the book, "SCICON Memories")

In spring of 1973, the land adjoining SCICON on the west and south was being offered for sale as housing sites. Over half of the trails and points of interest at SCICON were on this private land. SCICON had always enjoyed free use of these trails for its curriculum. Now the owners notified the school that they could no longer use those trails. This land was in clear view of almost every spot at SCICON. If development proceeded as proposed, SCICON's aesthetic and wilderness value would be greatly impaired.

Buying the needed property (1,100 acres) was the obvious solution. There was a problem with that scenario, however. There was scarcely enough money in the Friends of SCICON budget for routine operating costs. How could they expect to make an offer on the property? As usual, Charles Rich had an idea: Why not have a fund-raising drive of some type, with people from throughout Tulare County buying acres? Lengthy negotiations followed between the Friends of SCICON and the attorneys for the property owners. They finally came to an agreement. The Friends of SCICON could purchase 1,000 acres for \$250 per acre. To do so, they were going to have to make three payments of nearly \$100,000 each year for the next three years – quite an undertaking for a group that had never seen more than \$1500 in their treasury at any one time.

The "Acres for SCICON" drive officially kicked off in April of 1973. Doug Lovik, Jim Conrad and Penny Bradshaw (a student at Tulare Union High School) were named chairpersons for the

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drive. The three chairpersons now had the job of getting this presentation out to the public.

Doug Lovik and Jim Conrad contacted every club and civic group they could think of. Penny Bradshaw, the student leader, began contacting all the high schools, elementary schools, PTA's and related groups.

Responses were high and the money began to come in. Students throughout Tulare County rallied behind the Acres for SCICON drive. Many sixth-grade classes were able to purchase an acre for SCICON. PTA's throughout the county supported the 'Acres for SCICON' in every way possible. They lined up groups for presentations, distributed information, contacted parents for contributions and held fund-raising events. The PTA's purchased acre after acre throughout all three years of the drive's existence. When the Tulare Rotary Club had seen the Acres for SCICON presentation, someone in the club suggested they buy an acre for every member of the club. Over the following three-year period, the Tulare Rotary purchased and donated eighty acres to the Friends of SCICON.

In the eleventh month of the first year of the Acres drive, the Friends of SCICON began to worry. They were \$15,000 short of the \$100,000 needed for the first payment. As time grew short, County Superintendent of Schools, Max Cochran, saved the day. He was holding a \$10,000 donation from an anonymous donor in Lindsay as well as \$5000 in other donations. The momentum of the fundraising drive continued during the second year. As the second installment of \$100,000 was nearing, donations from the Dinuba community put the Acres for SCICON drive

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over the top once again. The successful Acres for SCICON drive was a county-wide effort. Yet the last “official” acre was not purchased by a citizen of Tulare County. It was bought and donated by Wilson Riles, State Superintendent of Public Instruction. On January 29, 1976, the Friends of SCICON, made their final payment. All the deeds to the 1000 acres were in hand, ready for use in the SCICON program.

In honor of SCICON’s 50th Anniversary, visitors to the annual barbecue will enjoy a special historical photo exhibition in the John Muir Lodge entitled “SCICON Through the Years.” In addition, at 2:30 p.m. on the day of the barbecue, there will be a special “SCICON Founders Ceremony” honoring many individuals who were influential in the development of the program. The entire campus will be open for visitors, including the natural history museum and the planetarium. Hourly wildlife shows and guided wildflower/nature hikes will also be conducted. There will be performances by student groups throughout the day. SCICON 50th anniversary posters will be available at no charge to the visiting public.

“SCICON is a success because of the work school districts, service clubs, companies and individuals have done in partnership with the program over the past 50 years,” says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak. “It is one of the finest examples of community support I’ve ever known.”

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The famous SCICON Barbecue lunch features beef simmered in a deep-pit and SCICON's special barbecue sauce. The meal also includes coleslaw, ranch beans and rolls, compliments of volunteers from local school districts. Meal tickets are \$10.00 for adults, \$5.00 for seniors (60 and over) and \$5.00 for children (12 and under.) Meal tickets can be purchased in advance at the Tulare County Office of Education at 2637 W. Burrel in Visalia. There will also be plenty of meal tickets available at the SCICON campus on the day of the event.

SCICON is the outdoor school of science and conservation operated by Tulare County Office of Education. Over 15,000 fifth- and sixth-grade students visit the campus located in the foothills above Springville each year. The SCICON Barbecue and Wildflower Festival is sponsored by Tulare County Office of Education and the Friends of SCICON. For more information on the SCICON Barbecue, please call (559) 539-2642.

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