

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

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For Immediate Release

Contact: Robert Herman
Public Information Officer
(559) 733-6606 – office
(559) 303-8568 – cell

Tulare County Office of Education Announces:

Students invited to *Allensworth: Then and Now* event October 10 • Noon – 2:00 p.m. • Allensworth State Park

This year, California State Parks is celebrating the 100th anniversary of the founding of Allensworth in southern Tulare County – a unique town dedicated to the dignity of the human spirit. Students from all over Tulare County have been invited to participate in *Allensworth: Then and Now* – an interpretive history exercise that will take place on October 10 – the day before Allensworth’s 100th Anniversary Celebration. By traveling to **Allensworth State Historic Park**, students will experience firsthand the inspiring story of the people who came to an isolated spot in the southern San Joaquin Valley to build a place of their own.

Allensworth: Then and Now grew out of a partnership between the Tulare County Office of Education, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors and California State Parks. Educators, local County leaders and park officials wanted to develop a learning project that would foster a greater understanding of the historical significance of Allensworth – a town founded, financed and governed by African Americans in 1908.

“The Allensworth Centennial Celebration, planned for October 11-12, offered us an excellent opportunity to expand our student awareness and knowledge of this historic community,” said Jim Vidak, Tulare County Superintendent of Schools. “California State Parks interpretive rangers have put a lot of time and

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effort into working with our educators to develop appropriate learning activities of what life was like during the time period when Allensworth flourished.”

Allen Allensworth, the town’s namesake, was born a slave in 1842 in Louisville, Kentucky. He fled slavery and joined the Union Army. After many years of exemplary service, Allensworth retired in 1906, as a lieutenant colonel — the highest Army rank ever held by an African-American soldier at that time. In 1908, Allensworth and colleague, William Payne, purchased land along the Santa Fe Railway and named it Allensworth. When word spread to African-American southern and military families about the town, many doctors, teachers and farmers answered the call of the “Freedom Colony.” The town reached its peak in 1912 to 1915 with about 300 families.

“The story of Allensworth not only plays an important role in our Nation’s history, it is a story that plays a key role in our state’s history,” said Supervisor Connie Conway, Chairman of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors. “Allensworth was founded by settlers seeking to establish an agricultural community and their financial independence in what is now the second most productive farming region in the nation. And now, with the help of our Tulare County school leaders and state parks officials, we are able to help share that rich historical significance with the children in our communities.”

On Friday, October 10 from noon-2:00 p.m., approximately 240 students will go to standards-aligned learning stations throughout the park, and learn about people and events that shaped Allensworth. Third, fourth and eighth graders will participate; these grade levels were chosen because state standards focus third graders attention on local history, fourth graders focus on California history, and eighth graders focus on the period from the Civil War to World War II.

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Visiting classes will be divided into “Freedom Family Groups” so that someone in each class will visit every learning station. Stations will focus on: children’s games of the 19th century, candle making and blacksmith demonstrations, and a tour of several of the town’s many buildings, such as the hotel. Students will also examine a rail car as well as learn about the natural resources in Allensworth that spurred Colonel Allensworth to found the freedom colony in Tulare County.

"It is very important that we recognize the role of African Americans in our state's history," said State Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell. "The Allensworth school project will make this aspect of our history come alive for many students. I am very pleased that the State Parks recognized the historical significance of Allensworth and is partnering with our schools to share the story of these early Californians."

When students return to their classrooms, they will demonstrate their experience through a project which will be due December 12. Project categories are: posters, documentaries and essays. The projects will be judged and awards given at a reception held January 16, 2009 in the Education Center at the Burrel Avenue office of the Tulare County Office of Education.

“We greatly appreciate the efforts of California State Parks and the Tulare County Board of Supervisors for making this event possible for our students,” said Superintendent Vidak. “We look forward to seeing the projects the students develop from their experience at the *Allensworth: Then and Now* event.”

Allensworth Then and Now is limited to 10 classes. Contact Marsha Ingrao with Tulare County Office of Education at (559) 651-0680 or by e-mail at marshai@ers.tcoe.org for registration and information.

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Special note to editors, reporters and photographers

This town provides an amazing opportunity for journalists who wish to gather photographs and special stories that capture the pioneering spirit that built this unique settlement. Homes, businesses, the school, the community church and many other buildings have been restored as they were in the early 1900s.

Please visit the California State Parks website to view a series of pictures of the restored community.

www.parks.ca.gov/allensworth/centennial - This site includes information about the centennial event.

www.parks.ca.gov/allensworth/allaboard - This site includes information about the Amtrak trains to Allensworth during the event.

www.parks.ca.gov/allensworth/virtualtour - This site includes images of Allensworth's buildings, photos are copyrighted to California State Parks but may be used for press/media use only (credit line is © 2008 California State Parks).

www.parks.ca.gov/allensworth/formedia – This site includes information specifically for the media, including press releases, links, and information about requesting photographs for media use (in addition to and in higher resolution than those on our Virtual Tour webpage mentioned above). Please do not release this address to public; it is intended for the press only.

About the Allensworth Restoration

Since 1985, California State Parks has spent over \$9.4 million for reconstruction, restoration, furnishings and infrastructure at the historic park. Extensive road, utility and other infrastructure improvements have been made. More than 22 different structures have been reconstructed or restored, including the historic Baptist church, the Hackett house, Hackett barn, Ashby house and barn, Johnson Bakery/residence, the Carter Livery Stable and the historic hotel. Today, a walk through this town is an experience in turning back the clock; one sees much of this restored community as it appeared in the early 1900s.

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