

Tulare County Office of Education

Jim Vidak, County Superintendent of Schools

February 20, 2008

Media Alert

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

Tulare County Office of Education, in partnership with College of the Sequoias, Tulare County Superior Court, CASA of Tulare County, and Tulare County Independent Living Program Announces:

First Annual Access to Higher Education Luncheon **Scheduled for Saturday, February 23.**

9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. · College of the Sequoias

Visalia - Approximately 80 foster youth from Tulare and Kings county high schools will be treated to a special program Saturday, February 23, 2008. Entitled “Access to Higher Education,” the event is designed to encourage high school students in the foster youth system to explore and enroll in educational opportunities beyond high school.

The event will be held at College of the Sequoias and begin with breakfast and a motivational address by Dean of Science, Mathematics and Engineering, Dr. Robert Urtecho. Following breakfast, students will attend four breakout sessions on topics including financial aid, four-year universities, community colleges and private college options.

The highlight of the event will be a luncheon featuring guest speaker Dave Pelzer. Mr. Pelzer is the author of six inspirational books including: *A Child Called “It,” The Lost Boy* and *A Man Called*

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Dave. The books draw from Mr. Pelzer's horrific experience as a child who was nearly killed several times by his mentally disturbed, alcoholic mother. At the time, his was one of the most gruesome and extreme cases of child abuse in California's history. Finally at age 12, he was rescued and placed in foster homes. At 18, he enlisted in the Air Force.

Mr. Pelzer's presentation, entitled *Help Yourself for Teens*, is based on a self-titled book which places a strong emphasis on addressing one's problems and identifying how decisions made now will affect the future. The author's premise is to inspire young adults to become more productive, proactive, and responsible for their own lives.

The "Access to Higher Education" event was modeled after a similar program developed by Judge Leonard Edwards, Judge-in-Residence for the Administrative Office of the Court and a retired judge of the Santa Clara County Superior Court. Last fall, Judge Edwards visited Tulare County to promote creating greater opportunities for foster youth. The organizing members of the "Access to Higher Education" event accepted his challenge. Organizers include College of the Sequoias; the Tulare County Superior Court; the Tulare County Office of Education; the Tulare County Independent Living Program (a division of Tulare County Health and Human Services); and CASA of Tulare County. "It is rewarding to see how everyone has worked together so well and so quickly to create this opportunity for our foster youth," says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak.

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The Rotary Club of Visalia, the Tulare County Health and Human Services Agency and the Tulare County Office of Education are sponsors of the event.

Members of the media: Please review the attached Superior Court Order (#2008 -01), which addresses interviewing and photographing foster youth. Thank you.

-TCOE-

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