

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 Looks Back at Early Years of Program and Sets Plans for 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 II)

In Part I of SCICON'S history, it was noted how Charles Rich, county schools science coordinator, and Tulare County Superintendent of Schools J. Post Williams helped SCICON get a prototype program started at Camp Tulequoia (a Y.M.C.A. facility) in 1958. In part II, Charles Rich, along with Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Max Cochran, involved the community as the campus was developed at its new site above Springville.

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Student Cabins

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

By early 1962, several school districts in Tulare County were preparing to build cabins at SCICON'S new Clemmie Gill site. The SCICON Administrative Committee provided basic design drawings and general specifications. First, the cabins were to be large enough to house nine students and one counselor. Second, they were to be located in areas that would least impact the natural environment at SCICON. Finally, they were to be built of materials that would best represent the philosophy of conservation and wise use of natural resources.

Tulare was the first community to start building their cabin, and completed it in 1962. Others soon followed. By December of 1963, nine more cabins were started by communities and school districts (Ivanhoe, Woodlake, Earlimart, Burton, Pixley, Orosi, Dinuba, Lindsay, Exeter and Visalia). The Porterville Learning Center was completed in 1973. Delano Cabin, built in 1979, brought the total of student cabins to an even dozen. Five of these cabins stood just up the hill from the John Muir Lodge, and comprise what was known as the "Girls Village." The other seven are situated below the lodge, and comprise the "Boys Village."

Even when the Villages were complete, one additional cabin remained to be built. This was the Handicabin, erected in 1981 to meet the special needs of handicapped youngsters. Its construction meant they, too, could at last experience the week-long SCICON adventure.

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Like the other cabins at the outdoor school, the Handicabin came into being through the combined efforts of many groups and individuals. Says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools, Jim Vidak, (then the Director of SCICON during the Handicabin project), “That was the fastest building project I’ve ever been a part of. No sooner had we announced the need for this facility, the fundraising goal was met.” The Handicabin came into being through the combined efforts of many groups and individuals, and bears proud testimony to the truth of the SCICON motto: “SCICON is people working together.”

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 continuous musical 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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