



***Guest Release Provided by the Fresno Assembly Center Memorial Upgrade Committee

JAPANESE COMMUNITY JOINS WITH THE BIG FRESNO FAIR TO MEMORIALIZE VALLEY STORIES OF INTERNMENT

Most visitors who stream through the gates of The Big Fresno Fair each year probably walk right past the Commerce Building without even noticing a commemorative marker tucked away in a flower bed. Most visitors are unaware that thousands of Japanese immigrants and American citizens of Japanese ancestry from the Valley passed through those same fairground gates on their way to internment camps in 1942.

Now plans are underway to transform the area into the Fresno Assembly Center Memorial with the marker as its centerpiece. The Memorial will share the story of the Japanese American internment experience through storyboards illustrated with photos and commentaries by former Valley internees and their families. Banners featuring local photos from the period will also help educate visitors about the historical significance of the site.

A public awareness campaign encouraging former local internees to contribute their personal stories will be launched at this year's Fair. Redesign of the area is expected to be completed in 2010, when an official unveiling is planned in conjunction with opening day of next year's Fair.

More than five thousand Japanese Americans from the Valley, including Fresno and Clovis, were temporarily housed at the Fresno Assembly Center from May through October 1942. This was an early phase of the mass incarceration of over 120,000 Japanese Americans during World War II. Yet not a single Japanese American was ever charged or convicted of espionage or sabotage, which was the perceived military necessity for internment. The original Historic Marker 934 which currently marks the site was dedicated on February 19, 1992, on the 50th anniversary of Executive Order No.9066. The Executive Order authorized by President Franklin D. Roosevelt was the basis for the internment orders.

“The Japanese American community is pleased to again partner with the Fresno District Fair to memorialize the internment of over 5,400 Americans of Japanese ancestry interned at the Fresno Fair.



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The Memorial aspires to teach a lesson in history that such injustices never recur,” said Bob Shintaku, who is the committee Co-Chair of the Fresno Assembly Center Memorial Upgrade Committee.

The Big Fresno Fair Board of Directors approached the Committee last year to upgrade the Fairgrounds site following successful completion of the Pinedale Assembly Center Remembrance Memorial Plaza. The estimated cost of the Fresno project is \$100,000. Approximately half has been committed by contributions from the Central California District Council of the Japanese American Citizens League, Fresno District Fair and a grant from the California Civil Liberties Public Education Program. Contributions and sponsorships are being accepted.

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