

# 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 Celebrates 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary at Annual Barbecue Sunday, April 20, 2008 · 11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

The SCICON program is planning a 50<sup>th</sup> 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.

SCICON began with a vision of teaching Tulare County children about science, nature and conservation in an outdoor setting. In the mid-1950s, this was a bold idea. Charles Rich, county science coordinator, with the support of the Tulare County Superintendent of Schools, J. Post Williams, was able to initiate the first pilot SCICON program in the fall of 1958 at the YMCA site of Camp Tulequoia.

Following the immediate success of the program at Camp Tulequoia, and bolstered by the support of the Tulare County Board of Education, Charles Rich passionately set out to find a

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permanent site for this program in the heart of Tulare County. He had heard about some land in the foothills above Springville that had possibilities.

## *Clemmie Gill's Generosity*

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

*The land was in Bear Creek Valley, a mile and a half off the old Balch Park road, near the point where Rancheria and Bear Creeks meet. Owned by the Gill family, the land was part of what once had been a 67,000-acre cattle ranch, among the largest in the West. Mrs. Clemmie Gill, then 91 years of age, was the family matriarch.*

*In 1958, Charles Rich had a series of meetings with Mrs. Gill. He discussed his philosophy of education, explaining what he thought the children of the county should be getting from their schools that they weren't presently getting. He also explained the importance of environmental education and the impact it could have on the students' lives. The conversations were long and difficult. Clemmie Gill was not given to idle chatter. Rich sat close to her and tried to present his ideas as clearly as possible. Occasionally, she would interrupt and ask him to clarify some point or another. Otherwise, she said very little and dismissed him with a little wave of the hand when she got tired.*

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*Apparently Clemmie Gill was impressed by what Charles Rich had to say. In 1958, she agreed to donate 35 acres of land to the Tulare County Schools Office “for educational purposes.” She died a year later, at the age of 92. Yet her name lives on today, in appreciation of her gift to the students of Tulare County. By unanimous decision, the SCICON Administrative Committee named the campus the Clemmie Gill School of Science and Conservation. SCICON had a home.*

In honor of SCICON’s 50<sup>th</sup> 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.

“This is the great time to revisit SCICON and appreciate all that has been created in the past 50 years,” says Tulare County Superintendent of Schools Jim Vidak. “Working together, area school districts, service clubs, companies and individuals have built an incredible program, which has made a lasting impact on the lives of thousands of young people.”

The famous SCICON Barbecue lunch will be served featuring beef simmered in a deep-pit barbeque and served with the special SCICON Barbecue sauce. The meal also includes coleslaw,

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ranch beans and rolls, compliments of volunteers from local school districts. Meal tickets are \$10.00 for adults, and \$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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