

NEWS RELEASE

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Grand Opening Set for Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation Interpretive Learning Center

Former WWII Japanese American Internees and Families to Participate in Pilgrimage

Event Speakers to Include Tom Brokaw, Sen. Daniel Inouye, Judge Lance Ito and Boyhood Friends Sec. Norman Mineta, Sen. Alan Simpson

WASHINGTON, D.C. (July 28, 2011) – The grand opening of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation’s long-awaited Interpretive Learning Center on Saturday, Aug. 20, will offer visitors a special opportunity to tour the new museum, located at the former World War II concentration camp in Park County, Wyo., where nearly 14,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were imprisoned from 1942 to 1945.

According to Shirley Ann Higuchi, chair of the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation, some 1,000 former internees, descendents and supporters across the nation are planning a pilgrimage to the site to honor Heart Mountain survivors and commemorate the opening of this lasting tribute to their experiences. The theme for the three-day celebration, Aug. 19-21, is “Lessons from the Past...Guidance for the Future.” The weekend also will include the world premiere of the film, “All We Could Carry: The Story of the Heart Mountain Relocation Center,” by Academy-Award® winning filmmaker Steven Okazaki.

“The grand opening of the Interpretive Learning Center is the result of an enormous effort to preserve this historic site and interpret what occurred there for the current and future generations of Americans,” said Higuchi, a third-generation *sansei* whose parents were incarcerated with their families as children at the Heart Mountain Relocation Center.

“The Heart Mountain Interpretive Learning Center and surrounding site will stand as a powerful reminder of the need to balance concern for national security with respect for basic civil rights,” she stated. Higuchi, a Washington, D.C.-based attorney and past president of the District of Columbia Bar, said it is the only museum of its type built by a private foundation and only the second U.S. museum commemorating the site of a former Japanese American concentration camp.

According to former U.S. Sen. Alan Simpson of Wyoming, who serves as honorary advisor to the Foundation, it will be a world-class educational center. “When the Heart Mountain Interpretive Learning Center opens its doors to the public for the first time, it will mark the culmination of an important preservation effort that has

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long involved the communities of Cody and Powell, Wyo., and the Japanese Americans who were incarcerated there,” said Simpson. “It will be a most significant new museum and an exciting and inspiring new visitor attraction for this region and our entire country,” he stated.

A public dedication ceremony at the Heart Mountain Interpretive Learning Center is planned for Saturday, Aug. 20, with tours of the Interpretive Learning Center to follow. The museum will remain open until 8 p.m. on Saturday, and on Sunday and Monday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Foundation also is planning two dinner events at the Park County Fairgrounds scheduled for Friday, Aug. 19, and Saturday, Aug. 20.

Award-winning broadcast journalist and author Tom Brokaw will be the special guest speaker for the pilgrimage dinner on Fri., Aug. 19, at the Park County Fairgrounds in Powell, Wyo. Currently a special correspondent for NBC News, Brokaw’s best-selling book, “The Greatest Generation,” includes the story of the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II.

While the Friday dinner will emphasize “Lessons from the Past,” the grand opening banquet Saturday, Aug. 20, also at the Park County Fairgrounds, will focus on “Guidance for the Future.” A panel of leaders from across the country will comment on legal, legislative, psychological and philanthropic perspectives of the Japanese American experience, and how it informs today’s civil rights discussions. The panel will include Los Angeles County Superior Court Judge Lance Ito, a respected advocate for civil rights and judicial reform, whose parents were incarcerated at Heart Mountain; Irene Hirano Inouye, president of the US-Japan Council; and Dr. Melba Vasquez, President of the American Psychological Association.

Dedication Ceremony Will Reunite Old Friends

The Saturday dedication ceremony will begin at 10 a.m., adjacent to the Interpretive Learning Center, and will feature a keynote address from Sen. Daniel Inouye of Hawaii, a World War II hero who worked to pass the Civil Liberties Act of 1988, granting a formal apology and token redress payments to surviving Japanese Americans incarcerated during the war.

Joining Sen. Inouye at the ceremony will be two statesmen who famously met at Heart Mountain as Boy Scouts when one was incarcerated there with his family and the other belonged to a troop in his nearby hometown of Cody. Former Sen. Alan Simpson and former Congressman and Secretary of Transportation and Secretary of Commerce Norman Mineta, became lifelong friends and long-time colleagues, and both serve as honorary advisors to the Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation.

Following the ceremony and throughout the weekend, the public will be able to tour the new Heart Mountain Interpretive Learning Center, which houses permanent exhibits, artifacts and interactive displays in a barracks-like structure that captures a sense of everyday life at Heart Mountain. Visitors will learn about the forced military removal of people of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast, their arrival at Heart Mountain, how families struggled to live under harsh conditions, and the challenges of rebuilding their lives after the war.

Visitors also can experience a paved, 1,000-ft. loop walking tour with informational kiosks. The Heart Mountain Interpretive Learning Center is located on Road 19, off Highway 14 between Cody and Powell, 60 miles east of Yellowstone National Park. More information can be found at www.heartmountain.org.

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