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NEWS RELEASE
For Immediate Release
March 11, 2011

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ORANGE COUNTY'S OLDEST PUBLIC SCHOOL CELEBRATES 160TH YEAR

Rededication of Historic Bell Highlights San Juan Elementary Anniversary

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO—San Juan Elementary School, the oldest public school in Orange County, will celebrate its 160th anniversary on Friday, March 25 with a ceremony that will feature former and current students and a rededication of the bell that once signaled the start of class.

“The history and development of California’s education system can be traced back through San Juan School,” Capistrano Unified School District Superintendent Joe Farley said. “Every single educational concern of the past 160 years played out in one way or another at this historic site.”

For many years, San Juan Elementary School was the only school in the San Juan Capistrano School District, one of five school districts in Los Angeles County in 1850. The school was the only one in southern Los Angeles County (present-day Orange County) until a district and school was established in Santa Ana in 1854-1855. In 1965, the San Juan Capistrano School District united with other South Orange County school districts to create the Capistrano Unified School District.

“It is important that our current students see the link to the past,” Principal Silvia Pule said. “The history of this school is exciting and we want everyone to know about the important role this school has played in the region’s history and the important role it, and its students, will play in the future.”

Tours of the school property will begin at 1 p.m. The ceremony starts at 2:45 p.m.

The school bell was originally donated in 1907 by William Stroeheim. Since then, the school has gone through several renovations. The original bell is still on the grounds; however, its ringing no longer signals the start of the school day. The bell now sits on the front lawn and stands as a reminder that even before its time, students have been coming to the same four acres of adobe land for a quality public education.

“This school means a tremendous amount to this community,” 160th Anniversary Celebration Chairperson Michele Taylor-Bible said. “As parents, we respect the historic significance of this school, but are even more excited about its role in educating our children and strengthening our community.”

San Juan Elementary School is not only the oldest public school in Orange County, but has been continuously integrated since its inception in 1850. Today, the school is even more diverse and offers students a unique educational experience with its dual-language immersion program. The school currently educates about 730 students in grades K-6 and has made significant progress in its educational program, improving its Academic Performance Index score by 66 points in the last year alone.

For more information on the anniversary celebrations, contact the school at (949) 493-4533.