



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bob Massad Education Center Now Open at Wakamatsu Farm

Placerville, CA. March 8, 2024. To celebrate the completion and grand opening of a building under construction since early 2021, American River Conservancy (ARC) hosted the ribbon-cutting celebration of the new *Bob Massad Education Center* located at Wakamatsu Farm in Placerville, CA. Undeterred by “blizzard warnings” issued by the National Weather Service around the grand opening date of March 1st, over 70 excited guests joined the long-anticipated and joyous occasion. They sipped warm refreshments in the chilly, gusty winds and occasional light rain under the cover of the Center’s new roof. Fortunately, the open-air pavilion-style building fulfills its reason for existence as a sturdy reprieve from nature’s tempestuous moments.

Joining ARC staff, board, and guests were honored VIPs who shared heartfelt short speeches, including: Chief Ranger Barry Smith of CA State Parks, Gold Fields District; Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Accountability Gabrielle Marchini of the El Dorado County Office of Education; Board Member Gregory Mukai of the JA Community Foundation; Architect Peter McBride of ArchNexus; and metal artist Jay Stargaard, who designed and installed the new donor tree on the building. Wani’s Tacos provided wholesome food; Jeff Chamberlain performed live music; and former El Dorado County Poet Laureate Taylor Graham read her own poetry created during her long-standing “Capturing Wakamatsu” poetry workshops. Docent Herb Tanimoto led a small group to Okei-san’s historic grave to pay their respects.

Field Representative Heidi Mayerhofer of Senator Alvarado-Gil’s District 4 office delivered a *Certificate of Recognition* to ARC commemorating the building completion and grand opening, which states, “The teaching of the area’s cultural history, natural resources and principals of stewardship is a gift you give to all who will learn here and the places they will go with it.” Last year alone, ARC delivered environmental education programs to over 2,000 learners of all ages.

Both a California State and National registered landmark, Wakamatsu Farm is the historic site of the Wakamatsu Tea and Silk Farm Colony established in 1869, which was the first Japanese Colony in America. Since purchasing the property in 2010 from the Veerkamp family trust, ARC has improved the site with many amenities. Celebrating the Phase 1 completion of a new 1,920 square foot building for environmental education is a fitting and momentous achievement during ARC’s 35th anniversary year.

ARC is grateful for all the supporters who have made the new Education Center possible, including the 19 generous donors now recognized on the one-of-a-kind donor tree. Alone they provided \$423,402 of over \$450,000 in total raised for construction completion. The building is also named in honor of former ARC Board member Bob Massad, whose lasting bequest continues to support ARC’s innovative environmental education in El Dorado County. The foresight of such generous donors will foster champions for the environment for generations to come.

Phase 2 completion of ARC’s Education Center at Wakamatsu Farm continues toward final planning, funding, and completion. Aligned with ARC’s values of environmental responsibility, the structure will remain as “green” as feasible. Many costly and much-needed additions remain, including restrooms, solar electricity, and water service. At costs currently under \$200 per square foot, construction of Phase 1 has been well under California’s typical average for commercial and residential construction, which is also remarkable given pandemic challenges, material fluctuations, and costly regulations for public use. Additional funding is needed to support Phase 2 improvements. ARC welcomes contributions of money, materials, and services to complete the Education Center. To support the project, please contact arc@ARConservancy.org. Learn more about ARC’s 35-year history of community service through environmental conservation, stewardship, and education at ARConservancy.org.

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