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CHINESE AMERICAN MUSEUM TO CELEBRATE GRAND OPENING

Museum Will Be A Visual Symbol Of Community Pride And New Traditions

LOS ANGELES (November 12, 2003) - A new chapter in the legacy of Los Angeles' most historic location is about to begin as the Chinese American Museum (CAM) prepares to celebrate its highly-anticipated Grand Opening on Thursday, December 18, 2003. Symbolically located inside the Garnier Building, the last surviving structure from the city's original Chinatown at El Pueblo Historical Monument in downtown Los Angeles, the new community-based history Museum will serve as a regional education center on Chinese American history, heritage, and culture, providing learning and educational opportunities to a geographically-diverse audience of ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds. In addition, CAM will also operate as a vital resource for cultural identity and pride for over 500,000 Chinese Americans living in Southern California today.

To mark this historic occasion, a two-day celebration is scheduled for the Museum, beginning with a public Ribbon-cutting ceremony on Thursday, December 18, 2003 at 11 a.m. Over 300 people are expected to attend, including elected-officials, community leaders, Museum donors and members, as well as the general public. A special Opening Reception will follow on Friday, December 19, 2003 at 6 p.m., exclusive only to Museum donors, members, and elected-officials.

CAM's arrival heralds a rebirth of an important historical city architecture, and signifies the presence of the more contemporary community that exists today. A cultural and physical link to the past, this unique landmark will reflect the vibrant development of an immigrant history that began over 150 years ago in America, and specifically, when the first, major Chinese settlement was documented in Los Angeles in the 1860's.

A signature of cultural renaissance, CAM will stand as a symbol of "new and emerging traditions," reflecting the lives and experiences of both old and new immigrants, as well as those of the native-born.

"This Museum is dedicated to the generations of people who helped to build this community and to those who will continue to evolve it for the better," says Suellen Cheng, CAM's lead Curator and Executive Director. "We want people to use the Museum as a way to make a fundamental connection between their cultural past and who they are today."

Upon its debut, the two-story, 7,200 square feet Museum will provide the visitors with a visual, learning environment, featuring artifacts, photographs, and oral histories portraying life in early Chinatown, as well as

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exhibitions illustrating past and present-day contributions of Chinese Americans. Ranging from clothes to dishware, ornaments to furniture, herbs to literature, these artifacts echo the traditions, beliefs, fashion, and lifestyles from years past to present day. Currently, CAM has a growing collection of over 4,500 artifacts and over several thousand photographs and images, many of which were donated by people who are descendants of the community's pioneering families.

To emphasize the commitment to education, an on-site Museum Educator will work to establish a continuous relationship between the public and the Museum by creating and implementing docent programs, guided tours, hands-on workshops, and exhibit-based school curriculum for teachers and educators to integrate into their classrooms.

The Museum project was launched in 1984, following a successful walking tour series that included a visit of Old Chinatown during the City's Bicentennial celebration. The formation of the Friends of the Chinese American Museum, a community support group, began four years later under the leadership of Dr. Dan Louie, Jr. With financial assistance from the community, foundations, State of California and other government resources, the road to realizing a community-based museum began with the revitalization of the Garnier Building in the year 2000. Once a hub for Chinese activities and social gatherings during its heyday in the 1890s, the red-bricked Garnier Building, built by Phillippe Garnier, housed important fraternal, social, religious, and business organizations. Today, vast improvements have been made to modernize this historic facility, including installing features for fire, earthquake, safety, environmental and handicap usage.

Original flooring in the downstairs gallery and exposed portions of brick walls sprinkled throughout the Museum's interior are designed to provide visitors with a peek into the Building's natural, physical state while evoking a sense of timelessness and nostalgia.

"Not only did we want to restore the structure and reinterpret it for contemporary use, we also wanted to recapture the energy and vitality that was once present in this building back in the 1890s," says Sonia Mak, CAM Assistant Curator. "When people walk into the Museum, we want them to feel as though they are also taking a trip back in time."

Admission is free during the Opening Weekend of December 18-21, 2003. Thereafter, regular admission prices are \$3 for the general public, \$2 for seniors and students with I.D, and free for Museum members. Museum visiting hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The Chinese American Museum (CAM) is jointly developed and operated by the Friends of the Chinese American Museum (FCAM) and El Pueblo de Los Angeles Historical Monument, a department of the City of Los Angeles. CAM's mission is to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of America's diverse heritage by researching, preserving, and sharing the history, rich cultural legacy, and continuing contributions of Chinese Americans. For more information, please visit www.camla.org.