

## RIVERSIDE: Center for Social Justice opens



DAVID BAUMAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Visitors to The Center for Social Justice & Civil Liberties tour an exhibit chronicling the life of the late Japanese American artist and native Riversider Miné Okubo during a preview opening on Wednesday, June 27, 2012.

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Multiculturalism benefits all people, retired appellate court Justice John G. Gabbert said Wednesday at the opening of the Center for Social Justice & Civil Liberties in Riverside.

The center features the works of Riverside native and Japanese-American artist Miné Okubo, who left the bulk of her collection to her alma mater, Riverside City College.

The center will have regular operating hours in the fall and is open by appointment this summer.

The ground floor features exhibits of stories of social justice and civil liberties by Riverside residents, including Rupert and Jeannette Costo, advocates for Native Americans.

Gabbert, 103, recalled Rupert Costo from their days together as students at RCC in 1928. Gabbert said his RCC class of 1929 was diverse with 400 classmates.

He also recalled the threats against Art Littleworth, who was president of the Riverside school board, when the district voluntarily integrated elementary and middle schools in 1965. It was the first large school district in the country to integrate without a court order.

The dreams of people such as Littleworth, Costo and Okubo still resonate, Gabbert said.

Okubo graduated from RCC in 1933, went on to earn her bachelor's and master's degrees at UC Berkeley and was on her way to fame as an artist before she was among 100,000 to 200,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans in the western states who were sent to internment camps.

She sketched the people and life in the camps. Fortune magazine hired her in 1944. She also wrote a book, "Citizen 13660," the first account of life in World War II Japanese-American internment camps, published in 1946.

Former U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norm Mineta also was sent to an internment camp during World War II when he was 11. To those who knew Okubo, it was no surprise that she left her artwork and writings to RCC, Mineta said.

Mineta said he lives by the saying, "Never forget where you come from," and Okubo obviously remembered.

Riverside Community College District trustee Mark Takano, whose family was close with Okubo's family when he was very young, said Okubo gained confidence in her years at RCC. Okubo was very shy when she started as a college freshman, but she learned to write and speak more confidently.

Mineta said Riverside and the college were a secure base for the artist, who lived in a Greenwich Village apartment in New York after the war until her death in 2001. The college renovated the 1926 Heiting Building to house her collection.

"At the end of her life, she came back to where she started, to say look what I found, look what I learned," Mineta said. "When you look at her work in this magnificent building, I hope you will remember and see the amazing things that can be crafted and achieved if you never forget where you come from."