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Former transportation secretary expected for museum opening

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RIVERSIDE - Former U.S. Transportation Secretary Norm Mineta will be among the guests scheduled next week to celebrate the opening of Riverside Community College's Social Justice & Civil Liberties Center in downtown Riverside.

Mineta, who served in the Bush administration, was one of 110,000 Japanese-Americans relocated to World War II internment camps by order of President Franklin Roosevelt after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Mineta is expected to recall that experience during a ceremony Wednesday marking completion of RCC's civil liberties center, which is located at Market Street and University Avenue, adjacent to White Park.

A reception will get under way in the park, 3936 Chestnut St., at 5:30 p.m.

The center boasts a collection of 6,000 paintings and around 2,000 documents, including the famed Okubo Collection, which chronicles the life of Mine Okubo, a Riverside native who was imprisoned in a camp and designated "Citizen 13660."

She kept everything from her wartime internment, affording comprehensive research opportunities for scholars, according to Wellesley College Professor Elena Creef.

"For a historian, it's an absolute dream," she said. "There is simply nothing like this that exists."

The collection is featured on the second-floor of the center.

According to college officials, the facility's displays are intended to encourage study and discussion about social and civil liberties issues, including individual rights and racial equality, and their context in history.

There is a "Riverside Stories" interpretive exhibition, which provides first-hand accounts of efforts to achieve equality locally in the first of the 20th century.

One profile examines how resident Frank Johnson battled to integrate the city's public swimming pool in the 1920s; another story recalls the work of Riverside's "peace ambassador," Frank Miller, original builder and keeper of the Mission Inn.

Around 300 people are expected at Wednesday's event, which will be hosted by RCC Chancellor Gregory Gray. Tours of the Social Justice & Civil Liberties Center will follow, according to organizers.

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