

Tecate Community Museum Opens With Lively Traditional Arts Celebration

Tecate, Baja California, Mexico. Amidst the rhythm of gourd rattles and traditional chants interwoven with sage smoke in the expectant air, Kumiai cultural authorities blessed the first phase of Tecate's new community museum. Cheers broke out as ninety-one year old Teodora Cuero kicked



up her heels in a spontaneous dance after walking a wide circle around the museum, plaza and gardens, blessing the grounds and the participants in her native language. "It is time for us to have a museum that represents our culture," remarked Kumiai elder Josefina Lopez, after blessing the interior of the museum.

The festivities, held on June 11, 2011 marked the opening of the museum and included the participation of over 30 native artisans from the Kumiai, Paipai, Kiliwa and Cucapá communities of Baja California, demonstrations and tasting of

native foods such as barrel cactus buds, acorn mush and chia bread, traditional singing, dancing and storytelling, and an interpretive walk through the ethnobotanical gardens. Over 400 people, including members of Baja California's native communities, local Baja Californians and many visitors from the United States attended the event.



Secretary of Tourism Juan Tintos Funke reiterated his support for the project, congratulating Corredor Historico CAREM—the local community



organization that has spearheaded the effort—for its successful completion of phase one of the museum. The state tourism department (known as SECTUR) provided over \$100,000 US in funds for the first phase in 2009 and a similar amount in 2010 for the construction of a nineteenth century ranch house, phase two of the project that focuses on the historical period beginning in the 1770s. Tintos Funke announced that SECTUR would be providing an additional \$1,000,000 pesos

(approximately \$90,000 US dollars) for the construction of phase three of the museum which will present the contemporary period (1900 to the present) in the history of Tecate.

CAREM president Hernan Ibañez noted that “from the beginning when we began working with the Kumiai their priority was to make this museum a reality; we promised them we would, and for us it is important that today we are fulfilling that commitment.” Kumiai Norma Meza has been deeply involved in the development of the museum and the traditional structures built in the native plant gardens around the museum. “We are proud of our language, of our culture, our heritage. Now we have a place to present it to future generations.”



“With this first phase of the museum we hope to help visitors imagine native life as it existed for thousands of years before the arrival of non-Indians to the

region,” explained curator Michael Wilken-Robertson. “As hunters, gatherers and fishers, our ancient peoples moved throughout the different ecosystems of the peninsula, from coast to mountains and desert. In all of these areas they made a living by interacting with the native environments through ways of life that evolved over many generations. In subsequent phases of the museum, we will incorporate the changes in native lifeways that came about during the historical and



contemporary periods, but in this first phase we hope to provide a glimpse into the fascinating ancient history of this land.”

The museum building, designed by California artist James Hubbell, incorporates brick, stone, cedar wood and colorful glass windows into a dome shape inspired by the organic forms of Kumiai willow basketry, pine cones and barrel cactus. Inside the museum, a mural illustrates



traditional Kumiai activities in the region’s varied landscapes. Sculptures depict basketmaking, hunting and the gathering of shellfish. A collection of antique juncus basketry from throughout the wider region, loaned by collectors Joe Moreno and Rose Ramirez, along



with recent examples of basketry by local Kumiai artisans demonstrate the continuity in native artistic processes. Interactive signage allows visitors to read descriptions in either English or Spanish and to navigate into various levels of information.

The museum is managed by CAREM, a Mexican non-profit association based in Tecate, Baja California (www.carem.org). CAREM's mission is to identify, protect, preserve,



restore, and present to the public the historical and cultural heritage of Baja California, Mexico. CAREM also houses an auditorium and specialized research library with information on the history and culture of Baja California; computers with internet access are available free of charge.

The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

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