

INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY OUTREACH NETWORK

Press Release — for immediate release

Racism and “Broken Treaties” at *Gold Fever!*

Contact: 916/451-1372
Pager: 916/329-0315

SACRAMENTO, Sept. 21, 1999 — MEMBERS of the Sacramento staff and a local vendor for the *Gold Fever!* exhibit now at the Memorial Auditorium (August 1–October 31) have continued to engage in acts of discrimination and censorship against Native Americans despite a series of meetings and agreements to make the exhibit more inclusive, according to the Indigenous Community Outreach Network (ICON), a Sacramento area organization of Native people and friends.

Group calls “Vigil for Healing”

In response, ICON is seeking to restore trust in preparation for a series of exhibit-related community programs by inviting City and County officials and the community as a whole to a “Vigil for Healing” at the Memorial Auditorium, 16th and J Streets, this Thursday (September 25) at 5:00–6:30 p.m.

Broken agreements

Members of ICON participating in the negotiations with *Gold Fever!* staff state that Sacramento *Gold Fever!* District Manager Melita Rios-Samaniego and exhibit bookstore vendor Karen Pennington, also owner of *Gift & Gab* in Woodland, reneged on their agreements to make a place for the “Native voice” in the exhibit.

During the negotiation meetings, also attended by staff of the Oakland Museum, the developer and owner of the *Gold Fever!* exhibit, it

had been agreed that the bookstore would carry critical, scholarly sources on the California Indigenous Genocide such as Pratap Chatterjee’s *Gold, Greed, and Genocide* (Project Underground), a book which the Oakland Museum had carried to complement the exhibit there.

However, ICON members who visited the bookstore found this book (copies donated by Project Underground) and others hidden under a counter, thus negating the agreement’s intent to provide the public with a wider perspective on Native Peoples and the Gold Madness, sometimes also known as the “Gold Rush” of 1848.

Silencing the Native voice

In apparent retaliation for ICON’s efforts to have these books properly displayed, Ms. Rios-Samaniego moved a panel display by Native American artist and writer Chag Lowry on the genocide in Northwest California during the Gold Madness, which had earlier been displayed at the Oakland Museum and the Presidio, and removed a fact sheet prepared by the group to accompany this display.

She took exception to a statement decrying the local celebratory tone and promotion of *Gold Fever!*, an event actually commemorating the Indigenous Holocaust in California, including John Sutter’s invasion of 1839, and reaching its peak 150 years ago.

Ms. Susan Reece, a local resident and member of the Kanienkehaka (Mohawk) and Adawa (Ottawa) Nations, describes these breaches of the agreements as “acts of censorship and intimidation” against the Native community. For her, sadly, such conduct by Sacramento exhibit staff members is the continuation of a familiar pattern.

An incident of race

In early August, when *Gold Fever!* opened in Sacramento, Ms. Reece and another Native American woman visited the exhibit to see how it would treat Native issues — and were harassed and ejected on two occasions.

“They took one look at my dark skin and hair, and my *Free Bear Lincoln* T-shirt, and began falsely accusing me of recording the exhibit’s CD-ROM audio text.”

Bear Lincoln is a Native person recently acquitted in a Northwest California murder case revealing police abuses against Indigenous people. The staff had accused Ms. Reece of using her cassette machine, actually intended for personal notes about the exhibit, to record a commentary heard through headphones — a difficult task to attempt at best.

One possible indication of racism is the fact that Ms. Reece’s companion, appearing less obviously “Native,” had been permitted to carry the tape recorder with no questions asked.

In response to these incidents, and to concerns about the content and promotion of the exhibit, activists in the Indian and social justice communities entered negotiations with local exhibit staff members and representatives of the Oakland Museum.

Oakland Museum seeks justice

Various agreements were reached to present Native-related community programming similar to that offered in Oakland; to include Mr. Lowry's panel display; and to have the exhibit bookstore carry books on the California Indigenous Holocaust and survival.

History swept under the counter

However, "Negotiations are now shaky at best," states Ms. Reece. "At every turn, agreements are made, then agreements are broken."

For one ICON member, the placing of *Gold, Greed, and Genocide* under the counter at the bookstore is symbolic. "Not so long ago, that was where bookstores would proverbially place pornography. Do the exhibit and bookstore people consi-

der the actual historical facts concerning their presentation to be obscene? Is it less obscene to commit a genocide than to document it?"

Public funding, children at risk

The Native American group states that they have concerns over the involvement of public agencies and the use of public funds to support an exhibit which does not tell the full story of both the genocide and survival of Native Peoples of California, and where some local staff have engaged in "acts of racial hatred, censorship, and intimidation."

Schoolchildren, who make up a very substantial portion of the attendance at the exhibit, are also being deprived by such actions of the opportunity to learn the truth about the genocidal nature of the Gold Madness and the rich contributions of Native Peoples to our local region and state, according to ICON.

Group still joining in programs

Despite these problems, ICON is continuing to cooperate with the

Gold Fever! staff in a series of community programs starting this Saturday, September 27, with "An Afternoon Gathering Honoring the Native Community" at the Memorial Auditorium, 1:00-2:30 p.m.

Future programs at the same time of day and place include a Native panel discussing the impact of the "Gold Rush" on Indigenous California Nations, Sunday, October 3; an intercultural panel, Sunday, October 10; and a presentation by Wintun Scholar/Artist Frank la Pena, Wednesday, October 13. All events are free to the public.

Healing vigil to "clear air"

To "clear the air" and restore an atmosphere of peace and trust for these events, ICON has called a "Vigil for Healing" to be held at 16th and J Streets on Thursday, September 25, at 5:00-6:30 p.m. Exhibit staff members, City and County officials, and the general public are invited to move beyond the wounds of broken treaties and agreements to a spirit of trust and unity, a journey from genocide to community. □

Contact List

Ms. Susan Reece, ICON
Kanienukewaka / Adawa Nations
916/451-1372
Pager: 916/329-0315

Ms. Melita Rios-Samaniego, District Manager
Gold Fever!
916/914-8856
916/264-8955

Mr. James Henley, Sacramento City Archivist
916/264-7072

Ms. Paulette Bruce-Miller,
Director of Marketing and Public Relations
Stoorza-Ziehaus Metzger and Hunt
916/446-6667

Mr. L. Thomas Frye, Executive Director
Oakland Museum of California
510/238-3843

Ms. Carey T. Caldwell, Chief Curator of History
Oakland Museum of California
510/238-3843

Ms. Terri Cooke, Teacher/School Tour Guide
Gold Fever!
916/264-7072