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Parade, Dedication Will Celebrate Landmark Mendez vs Westminster Decision on Oct. 14

ORANGE, Calif., Oct. 8, 2009 -- Chapman University will commemorate the historic Mendez vs. Westminster decision, which desegregated California schools in 1947, with an evening of celebrations on Wednesday, Oct. 14 that will include an on-campus parade and the dedication of a new Mendez vs. Westminster study room and archive in the university's library.

The parade will step off at 6:30 p.m. in front of Reeves Hall on the Chapman campus (near the green lawn in front of Chapman's administration building, Memorial Hall) and will proceed past Memorial Hall to the Leatherby Libraries. The procession will be led by mariachi musicians and will include members of the families who participated in the Mendez case, including plaintiff families Mendez, Estrada, Guzman, Ramirez and Palomino; the family of Mendez attorney David Marcus; and members of the Munemitsu family, who leased their land to the Mendez family when they were interned as Japanese-Americans during World War II.

The parade will be followed by the dedication of the study room inside the Leatherby Libraries, at 7 p.m.

Sandra Robbie, who won an Emmy Award for her documentary "Mendez vs. Westminster: For All the Children/Para Todos Los Ninos," and who is currently on the staff of Chapman's College of Educational Studies, says the event will honor Orange County attorney Federico Castelan Sayre and his family, who gave the gift to name the Mendez vs. Westminster Study Room in Chapman's Leatherby Libraries.

"We're also celebrating the opening of Chapman's Mendez vs. Westminster Archive through this generous donation," adds Robbie. She and Chapman librarians are currently engaged in collecting original papers and artifacts related to the case, which will be housed in the library's Special Collections. The study room will contain displays and reproductions of the archival materials.

"This archive aims to become the hub for students, scholars and teachers from California and all across America to study and celebrate Mendez vs. Westminster and its connections to the American civil rights struggle and the ever-evolving American Dream," Robbie said.

The Chapman University Mendez vs. Westminster Archive is a collaboration initiated by the Leatherby Libraries and the College of Educational Studies.

ABOUT THE MENDEZ V. WESTMINSTER CASE

Thanks to the brave battle launched by the Mendez family in the 1940s, California became the first state in the nation to desegregate its schools. At the time, California – like many states – had segregated schools, movie theaters, even swimming pools. When third-grader Sylvia Mendez,

accompanied by her siblings, was not allowed to attend an all-white Westminster, California school because she was Mexican, her parents Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez sued the school district – and the rest is history. The 1947 Mendez v. Westminster case, a class-action lawsuit filed on behalf of more than 5,000 Mexican American students in Orange County, made California the first state in the nation to end school segregation. The landmark Mendez decision was commemorated on a U.S. postage stamp in 2007 and was voted into the California educational frameworks for 4th and 11th grades in 2009.