

PRESS RELEASE

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Ground Broken for New Central High Visitor Center *Ceremony Marks Countdown until the 50th Anniversary of the Desegregation of Central High School*

(Little Rock, AR) US Senator Mark Pryor (D-AR), US Congressman Vic Snyder (D-AR), and Little Rock Mayor Jim Dailey joined representatives of the National Park Service and members of the Little Rock Nine to break ground for the Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site's new Visitor Center. The event also marked the start of a countdown until the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the integration of Little Rock High School. Events are planned for September 2007 to mark the historic occasion.

In 2004, Mayor Dailey appointed a commission to plan activities for the 50th anniversary commemoration. It is co-chaired by Virgil Miller, a local banker, and Nancy Rousseau, the principal of Little Rock Central High School, and has nineteen other members and two representatives from the Little Rock Nine. At the ceremony, Miller announced that there will be an anniversary event on the front lawn of Little Rock Central on Tuesday, September 25, 2007 to mark the 50th anniversary of the date the Little Rock Nine entered Central High School.

Other events planned by the Commission are a two-day festival, educational forums, and judicial forums. Numerous other community events are already being planned. Among them: the Clinton Presidential Library will display the Emancipation Proclamation, the Arkansas Repertory Theatre will premiere a new play, and several museums and educational institutions are planning exhibits and forums. Additionally, the Little Rock Nine Foundation will host a fundraising gala to support their scholarship program.

Construction of the new Visitor Center is scheduled to begin in June 2006 with the grand opening anticipated in September 2007, coinciding with the 50th Anniversary commemorative events.

The new visitor center will help accommodate the growing number of people who are interested in learning more about civil rights and the Little Rock desegregation crisis. Visitation at the historic site has increased from 21,084 in 2001 (the year the National Park Service assumed operation of the visitor center) to 44,293 in 2005. The new facility will have about 3000 sq. ft. of exhibit space, which is almost six times the space than the current visitor center, which is about 500 sq. ft. The new visitor center's opening in 2007 will allow the NPS to convert the current visitor center, which is housed in the historic Mobil Gas Station, into an education center.

As a part of the groundbreaking ceremony, Tipton Hurst presented InnerCity Future Net with 500 begonias to kick-off the countdown. The vacant lot where the new Visitor Center will be built is the same location where the Tipton Hurst florist company began. Tipton Hurst was founded in 1886 by David M. Tipton and Joseph B. Hurst. Current President of Tipton Hurst, Howard Hurst presented the begonias on behalf of the Tipton Hurst family to InnerCity Future Net, which is a local community organization in the Neighborhood that is "dedicated to working with people to foster self-sufficiency through the rewards of gardening, helping families cut their living costs by growing food locally, and transforming vacant lots into community garden spaces."

Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site is one of 388 units of the National Park System, and one of only 76 National Historic Sites across the country. For more information about the historic site, phone (501) 374-1957 or visit us on the web at www.nps.gov/chsc <http://www.nps.gov/chsc>.