



Fontana Unified School District

Every Student Successful, Engaging Schools, Empowered Communities

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MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 4, 2023

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Fontana Unified to Dedicate Unity Garden at Randall Pepper Elementary in Honor of O'Day Short Family

WHAT: Fontana Unified School District will host a dedication ceremony of the O'Day Short Family Unity Garden to commemorate the lives of O'Day, Helen, Carol Ann and Barry Short. The unity garden will also serve as a symbol of an ongoing commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion by Randall Pepper Elementary School and the greater Fontana Unified community. The Short family is remembered for breaking Fontana's color barrier in 1945. All four members of the African-American family died after their house burst into flames on Dec. 16, 1945.

The Short family purchased and began building a home on a vacant, five-acre lot at Randall Avenue and Pepper Avenue in Fontana at a time when African-Americans were forbidden to live south of Baseline Avenue. The Short family received threats of violence and offers from the Chamber of Commerce to buy back the property before their house was set ablaze. An arson investigator hired by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) determined the fire was deliberately set from the exterior, according to a [2016 article from the Inland Valley Daily Bulletin](#). Randall Pepper Elementary School was later built on the site in 1950.

WHEN: **Friday, Dec. 15**
9 a.m. to 10 a.m.

WHERE: Randall Pepper Elementary School
16613 Randall Avenue, Fontana

DETAILS: Fontana Unified is proud to serve a diverse community and recognizes the importance of addressing past injustices. The District is deeply committed to fostering an inclusive educational environment that actively works toward equity and justice for all members of our community. Randall Pepper Elementary will continue to honor the Short family by holding an annual Unity Assembly in December to celebrate the many cultures and ethnicities that comprise its local and global community.

Coverage and/or inclusion of this event in your calendar of events is welcome and greatly appreciated.

OUR MISSION: The mission of the Fontana Unified School District is to graduate all students prepared to succeed in a changing world. Fontana Unified School District celebrates learning through the development of the whole child. Our commitment to excellence provides quality education, in depth, for all students.