



# Fontana Unified School District

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## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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

**FONTANA, CA** – Members from across the Fontana Unified community, including staff, students and elected dignitaries, gathered at Randall Pepper Elementary on Dec. 15 for the dedication of the O'Day Short Family Unity Garden that will serve as a living symbol of the District's ongoing commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

The O'Day Short Family Unity Garden commemorates the lives of O'Day, Helen, Carol Ann and Barry Short. The 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.

Fontana Unified's dedication ceremony included speeches from local pastors, District Board of Education President Marcelino "Mars" Serna, Superintendent Miki R. Inbody, Randall Pepper Principal Theresa Gomez and Dr. Daniel Walker, a historian, philanthropist, author, film director and former Randall Pepper student.

Student ambassadors welcomed Randall Pepper's visitors, who passed by photographs of the O'Day Short family as they walked to the heart of the campus to reach the O'Day Short Family Unity Garden. The Randall Pepper Choir performed "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," the African-American spiritual song, and fifth-grader Londyn Otis read the poem "Peace" by Sara Fox before a colorful peace pole – which reads "May Peace Prevail on Earth" in four different languages – was unveiled next to the garden.

"This garden is a chance for us to honor the lives that were taken from us," Inbody said. "As we stand in the presence of this unity garden here, let it be a symbol of resilience, strength and solidarity. Gardens by their nature represent growth, renewal and the cycle of life. They remind us that from the seeds of sorrow we can cultivate hope and healing."

Among the esteemed dignitaries who attended the event were City of Fontana Mayor Pro Tem Peter A. Garcia and Treasurer Janet Koehler-Brooks, Fontana Unified Board of Education Vice President Adam Perez, Fontana Teachers Association President Mark Schulte, United Steelworkers Local 8599 President Dawn Dooley and representatives from the offices of San Bernardino County Supervisor Jesse Armendarez, San Bernardino County Board of Education Trustee Laura Mancha and San Bernardino County Superintendent of Schools Ted Alejandre.

The O’Day 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 O’Day 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.

The O’Day Short Family Unity Garden came to life thanks to the collaboration of the Inland Empire Utilities Agency (IEUA) and the Chino Basin Water Conservation District under the umbrella of the IEUA’s Garden in Every School program. In addition to serving as a living monument to the O’Day Short family, the garden will serve as a learning center for generations of students exploring the world of science.

Randall Pepper Elementary will continue to honor the O’Day Short family by holding an annual Unity Assembly each December to celebrate the many cultures and ethnicities that comprise its local and global community.

“There is a legacy to live up to here at Randall Pepper,” Gomez said. “It is an honor to commemorate the lives of the O’Day Short Family who chose to take a stand in their world.”

#### **PHOTO CAPTIONS:**

**FUSD\_DEDICATION1:** From left, Fontana Unified Board of Education President Marcelino “Mars” Serna, Vice President Adam Perez, Randall Pepper Elementary Principal Theresa Gomez, Fontana Unified Superintendent Miki R. Inbody and District Director of Teaching and Learning Dr. Annette Beasley help dedicate the O’Day Short Family Unity Garden at Randall Pepper Elementary on Dec. 15. The O’Day Short Family Unity Garden includes a peace pole that reads “May Peace Prevail on Earth” in four different languages.

**FUSD\_DEDICATION2:** The Randall Pepper Elementary Choir sing “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” during the O’Day Short Family Unity Garden dedication ceremony on Dec. 15. The O’Day Short family is remembered for breaking Fontana’s color barrier in 1945.

**FUSD\_DEDICATION3:** Randall Pepper Elementary fifth-grader Londyn Otis, right, reads the Sara Fox poem “Peace” during the O’Day Short Family Unity Garden dedication ceremony on Dec. 15. All four members of the African-American, O’Day Short family died after their house burst into flames on Dec. 16, 1945. Randall Pepper was later built on the site of their five-acre lot at Randall Avenue and Pepper Avenue in 1950.

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