



National Park Service
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Tuzigoot National Monument Celebrates its 70th Birthday

An open house commemorating two historic events at Tuzigoot National Monument will be held Saturday, June 25, from 10 a.m. to noon, in the historic Visitor Center near Clarkdale. Seventy years ago, on July 25, 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the proclamation designating Tuzigoot as a national monument and five years earlier, the dust had just settled on the Civil Works Administration excavation project, completed the end of June, 1934.

In honor of the occasion, National Park Service staff will be presenting Heritage Awards to institutions and individuals who, according to park Superintendent Kathy Davis, represent the importance of cultural preservation, through either elected public service, volunteer hours, or oral and written documentation.

“We could not think of a better opportunity to honor some of the many local residents who have worked to preserve the history of Clarkdale and the upper Verde area,” explained Superintendent Davis. “There is much interest in heritage, and visitors from all over the world travel to central Arizona to learn about the past.” She added that the entire Tuzigoot project was designed to encourage more tourism and employment opportunities in the Verde Valley after mining and smelter operations gradually ceased operations and then closed.

Award recipients include Mayor Douglas Von Gausig and the Council, Town of Clarkdale, for supporting the Arizona Tourism and Rural Tourism Development grants awarded to Clarkdale and other projects in support of preservation. Mayor Von Gausig, a native of Arizona and professional photographer, has donated much time and expertise to digitizing the Clarkdale Heritage Center museum’s photography collection, according to Mary Lu Estlick of the Heritage Center. Other Council members include Curtiss Bohall, Richard Dehnert, Pat Williams, and Jerry Wiley.

The Board of Directors of the Clarkdale Heritage Center will be recognized for their all-volunteer efforts to secure grants, care for the archives, and accession new collections for the Heritage Center. Board chair Drake Meinke is helping construct kiosks that highlight various events in the history of Clarkdale. Other Board members include Mary Lu Estlick, Lee Daniels, Mary Sue Hill, Cyndy Lowry, and Cindy Emmett. Heritage Conservancy Board members for Clarkdale, also contributing, include Gerald Wombacher, Linda McDonough, Isabel Erickson, and Jesus Valdez.

Three prominent local historians will be cited for their achievements in documenting the stories and past of the upper Verde area.

Dilzhe'e Apache cultural preservation officer Vincent Randall of Clarkdale, is a published author, educator, and ethnohistorian who received a state Arizona Living Treasure Award in 2007. Mr. Randall has been instrumental in organizing Apache language classes, field trips, and traditional lifeways instruction for youth and adults.

Retired Air Force Captain and teacher, Jesus Valdez, is currently recording and correlating early 20th century census reports for the upper Verde area, among many other local history projects he has organized. The Valdez family was among the first to move into the Jerome and Clarkdale area with the opening of mining operations.

Retired Northern Arizona University professor of history, Dr. James Byrkit, grew up under the shadow of the Clarkdale smelter where his father was the manager. Dr. Byrkit remembers visiting the excavation at Tuzigoot and seeing University of Arizona archeologists Louis Caywood and Edward Spicer at work. He will share some of these memories on July 25.

The Tavasci family of Clarkdale has been linked with the area surrounding the monument since the early twentieth century. "Whenever I need a question answered, I call John and Phyllis," commented John Reid, Park Ranger at Tuzigoot for over 25 years. He added that the Tavascis have shared many historic photos and memories of the past with the Park Service. One of the first jobs for their son, John Tavasci, Jr., former superintendent of the Cottonwood-Oak Creek School District, was as a maintenance worker at Tuzigoot in 1966.

Louise Best's father, Ray Westbrook, was part of the excavation crew at Tuzigoot and she recalls a life of moving from place to place around the state, following whatever work was available in Arizona mines. Mrs. Best and her husband, Leo, have long supported local history projects, and volunteering at the Clemenceau Museum in Cottonwood.

Helen Mooney Copsey of Phoenix was one of the University of Arizona students who directed the care and reconstruction of artifacts removed from the excavation. This separate CWA project lasted two years and employed many local women as artists, piecing together over 150 prehistoric bowls and large ollas from truckloads of ceramic sherds hauled over from the work project.

For the future, several ambitious projects are in the works for the national monument. Park Superintendent Davis commented that a comprehensive administrative history of Tuzigoot National Monument is being prepared by Nancy Dallett, of the public history program at Arizona State University. An updating of the museum exhibit area is in the works, she explained, incorporating new research along with perspectives from affiliated Tribal elders and historians. Top scientists are interacting with the community to identify the needs and best plan of action to care for the Tavasci Marsh area.

There will be no fee for the two-hour open house and the community is invited. For any additional questions, call Ranger John Reid at 634-5564. He added, "The search is still on" to identify any of the workers or artists involved in the Tuzigoot project "before that

information is completely lost. We still want to put names to some of the faces so their contributions will always be remembered.”



The Visitor Center and Museum at Tuzigoot National Monument in 1937. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the proclamation enacting Tuzigoot National Monument 70 years ago on July 25, 1939. *Photo courtesy of the National Park Service.*

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