

## **CLASSROOM BENEATH THE STARS**

Charles Rich was a man that loved nature and believed all youngsters should be taught about science and nature and should learn to respect and preserve our natural resources. He felt the best way for students to learn about the environment and its protection should come not from a classroom and books, but from the environment itself and SCICON was born. School districts, communities and dedicated individuals went to work building student cabins, roads, hiking trails, instructional areas and a dining facility. SCICON is located eight miles above Springville east of Porterville. There are many miles of hiking trails, a museum of natural history, a planetarium, an observatory, a raptor center, and an amphitheater for evening activities. There are more than twenty cabins for students, teachers and staff. The 2013-2014 Tulare County Grand Jury visited SCICON and decided to report on its recent growth and expansion.

# Tulare County Office of Education

*Committed to Students, Support and Service*

August 18, 2014

**Jim Vidak**  
County  
Superintendent  
of Schools

2637 W. Burrel Ave.  
P.O. Box 5091  
Visalia, California  
93278-5091

(559) 733-6300  
www.tcoe.org

**Administration**  
(559) 733-6301  
fax (559) 627-5219

**Business Services**  
(559) 733-6312  
fax (559) 737-4378

**Human Resources**  
(559) 733-6306  
fax (559) 627-4670

**Instructional  
Services**  
(559) 733-6328  
fax (559) 737-4378

**Special Services**  
(559) 730-2910  
fax (559) 730-2511

The Honorable Judge Gary Paden  
County Civic Center, Room 303  
221 South Mooney Boulevard  
Visalia CA 93291

Tulare County Board of Supervisors  
2800 W. Burrel Avenue  
Visalia CA 93291

Tulare County Grand Jury  
5963 South Mooney Boulevard  
Visalia CA 93277

## RESPONSE TO 2014 TULARE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORTS

Enclosed are the following:

1. Classroom Beneath the Stars

We extend our gratitude to the Tulare County Grand Jury for their diligent efforts in compiling these reports. Our responses to your recommendations include detailed information gained through extensive research.

If I can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Jim Vidak  
Tulare County Superintendent of Schools  
SCICON

JV:mm

Enclosures

RECEIVED  
8 20 2014

August 19, 2014

The Honorable Judge Gary Paden  
County Civic Center, Room 303  
221 S. Mooney Boulevard  
Visalia CA 93291

Tulare County Grand Jury  
5963 S. Mooney Boulevard  
Visalia CA 93277

Tulare County Board of Supervisors  
2800 W. Burrel Ave  
Visalia CA 93291

Subject: Written Response of the **Tulare County Office of Education** pursuant to  
California Penal Code § 933(c)  
Report Name: **Classroom Beneath the Stars**

## **FINDINGS**

1. School districts, communities and dedicated individuals rolled up their sleeves and went to work building student cabins, roads, hiking trails, instructional areas and a dining facility. Learning not from a book but from nature itself gives students a better understanding of the importance of nature, their environment and their world.

***Response: The Tulare County Office of Education and County Superintendent of Schools agree with this finding.***

2. Students from Tulare County not only learn about nature; they learn to socialize and interact with students from other communities.

***Response: The Tulare County Office of Education and County Superintendent of Schools agree with this finding.***

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The Tulare County Grand Jury recommends SCICON'S organizations, directors and volunteers continue their extraordinary programs and activities on behalf of the youth of Tulare County

***Response: The Tulare County Office of Education, County Superintendent of Schools and SCICON agree with this finding because SCICON does and will continue to provide extraordinary programs and activities on behalf of the youth of Tulare County. We continue to see an increasing trend in student attendance.***

2. The Tulare County Grand Jury recommends SCICON implement additional Safety measures such as cameras within the village and security personnel.

*Response: The Tulare County Office of Education, County Superintendent of Schools and SCICON agree with this finding/recommendation. The SCICON campus entrance gate is locked and not opened until maintenance staff is on the premise. There is an assigned Village Coordinator to each cabin area who has access to radios and phones 24/7. Students are not allowed to go out at night alone. Additionally, recent E-rate grants will provide for the establishment of better security cameras placed on SCICON campus. The technical aspects of installing cameras in the future and finding the source to implement a higher level of security are currently being examined.*

*We will make note of all the recommendations suggested for improvements to the safety and security of the SCICON campus. We will be sure we share these recommended improvements. Once again, we extend our gratitude to the Tulare County Grand Jury for their diligent efforts in compiling these findings and recommendations.*

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October 3, 2014

The Honorable Judge Gary Paden  
County Civic Center, Room 303  
221 South Mooney Boulevard  
Visalia, CA 93291

Tulare County Grand Jury  
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Visalia, CA 93277

Tulare County Board of Supervisors  
2800 W. Burrel Avenue  
Visalia, CA 93291

## **RESPONSE TO 2014 TULARE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORTS**

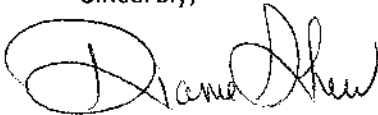
Enclosed please find the SCICON response to the Grand Jury findings dated June 17, 2014.

I would like to extend my sincere apology for the late response from the SCICON administration. With the change in administration it was an important and timely matter that was missed.

The Tulare County Grand Jury works hard to provide us with recommendations and commendations that help us continue our efforts to maintain high standards.

SCICON appreciates all of your hard work on our behalf. If I can be of further service, please feel free to let me know.

Sincerely,



Dianne Shew  
SCICON Administrator

Enclosures

RECEIVED  
10/17/2014

October 3, 2014

The Honorable Judge Gary Paden  
County Civic Center, Room 303  
221 South Mooney Boulevard  
Visalia, CA 93291

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Subject: Written Response of SCICON pursuant to California Penal Code 933(c)  
Report Name: Classroom Beneath the Stars

#### **FINDINGS**

1. School districts, communities and dedicated individuals rolled up their sleeves and went to work building student cabins, roads, hiking trails, instructional areas and a dining facility. Learning not from a book but from nature itself gives students a better understanding of the importance of nature, their environment and their world.

**Response: SCICON agrees with this finding.**

2. Students from Tulare County not only learn about nature, they learn to socialize and interact with students from other communities.

**Response: SCICON agrees with this finding.**

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The Tulare County Grand Jury recommends SCICON'S organizations, directors and volunteers continue their extraordinary programs and activities on behalf of the youth of Tulare County.

**Response: SCICON agrees with this finding. SCICON will continue to provide extraordinary programs and activities on behalf of the youth of Tulare County. Our attendance is increasing each year.**

2. The Tulare County Grand Jury recommends SCICON implement additional Safety measures such as cameras within the village and security personnel.

**Response: SCICON agrees with this finding/recommendation. The SCICON entrance gate is locked each night and not opened until maintenance staff arrives each morning. There is an assigned Village Coordinator to each cabin area whenever children are in the village. They are equipped with radios and phones 24/7. Students are not allowed to be alone at any time. Recent E-rate grants will provide for the establishment of better security cameras placed on SCICON campus. The technical aspects of installing cameras in the future and finding the source to implement a higher level of security are currently being examined.**

FILED  
OCT 7 2014

*We will make note of all recommendations suggested. Thank you for all of your efforts in compiling these findings and recommendations.*