



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**AUEN FOUNDATION DONATING \$10,000
TO RAISE MATCHING FUNDS FOR EAST VALLEY SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

"In Tough Times, We Cannot Afford to Forget Those Who Need Us Most"

Mecca, Calif., (March 23, 2009) –The Auen Foundation, trustees Ron and Sherrie Auen, are donating \$10,000 to help offset school supply costs and transportation for volunteers who read with students to improve English skills at Mecca Elementary School.

The Foundation is challenging Coachella Valley residents to raise matching funds for supplies not available through the regular school budget. As school budgets respond to drastic cuts, the timing of this effort is crucial.

Mecca Elementary School, one of the most underprivileged schools in the Coachella Valley Unified School District (CVUSD), is in constant need of money to buy basic supplies in order to successfully implement its academic agendas. The funds will help provide books, writing instruments and other much-needed supplies for classrooms.

The Auen Foundation partners with the "Mecca Angels," providing a bus that transports volunteers to the school. The public and social mission of the Auen Foundation includes a focus on intergenerational programs designed to enrich the lives of the elderly. Five days a week, 200 volunteers help students develop their reading skills. As a result, in just the last two years, test scores have gone up 150-points.

"We saw the incredible need for this program, and we wanted to help," explains Sherrie Auen. "In hard times, many people have been forced to tighten their belts. We feel that in tough times, we cannot afford to forget those who need us most. Knowing that we're helping these children learn and assisting them in their journeys through life gives us an amazing feeling of accomplishment."

For those seniors who volunteer with the students, the time is well spent.

"As a former primary grade teacher, I didn't realize how much I had missed teaching," says Aileen Bratton. "The most exciting part for me is when a child finally 'gets it' with reading – their faces just light up."

CVUSD schools are rated academically among the lowest in the state. In Mecca, more than 95-percent of the population does not speak English at home, and 18-percent of the children move from school to school during the year, following their parents' migratory work schedules.

"This area is so isolated, so the students only have an opportunity to speak English at school," explains Roberta Klein, Founder and Program Director of the Mecca Angels. "English-speaking role models are their teachers and volunteers. Most of these kids were born here and want to speak the language, so we really want to encourage people to volunteer their time and money for this worthy effort."

For more information about the "Mecca Angels," contact Roberta Klein at rnelsonwalker@aol.com and for more about the Auen Foundation, visit www.auenfoundation.org.

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