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PRESERVATION FLOURISHES AT MISSION SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO

Mechelle Lawrence-Adams isn't a name most visitors to Mission San Juan Capistrano would recognize. But without her, visitors probably wouldn't recognize the Mission.

Today when you visit Mission San Juan Capistrano, the birthplace of Orange County, California, you are met with pristine gardens and Koi-filled water fountains, the free standing stabilized ruins of the Great Stone Church, the restored Serra Chapel, the permanent exhibit of the Padres Quarters in the South Wing, temporary rotating exhibits in the West Wing, and six different language versions of the award winning adult audio tour, "Voices of the Mission".

Available to students, teachers, and parents include: the "California Missions Resource Studio" which features information on all 21 missions, the audio tour for children, "Saved by the Mission Bells: A Child's Journey Through California History", free summer kids activities, hands on weekly learning activities, and the "Adopt-A-Class" scholarship program that provide hands on learning field trips to low income schools.

While all of the above may seem commonplace today, most of these preservation efforts, educational tools, and community programs were not available eight years ago. For instance, eight years ago, the Great Stone Church was still being supported by scaffolding, there was no such thing as a student resource studio or the Adopt-A-Class program which has since served over 3,797 low income students with free field trips and audio tours were not yet available either.

So what changed? It was seven years ago, in 2003, when Lawrence-Adams was appointed as Executive Director of Mission San Juan Capistrano by Reverend Monsignor Arthur A. Holquin, Rector/Pastor Mission Basilica San Juan

Capistrano. As Executive Director for the Mission, Lawrence-Adams oversees 36 staff and nearly 300 volunteers, implementing a Strategic Plan to ensure Orange County's only mission is preserved for future generations and is a resource to the community and world at large.

Prior to becoming Executive Director, Lawrence-Adams worked for such cities as Seal Beach, Laguna Niguel, and San Juan Capistrano. Lawrence-Adams advanced to the position of Economic Development Manager for the City of San Juan Capistrano working directly for the City Manager and developing such programs as the City's downtown lighting program, historic plaque program, Annual Tree Lighting Program, Summer Nites Concert Series, and Historic Preservation Strategic Plan.

A mother of two, Lawrence-Adams was born and raised in Orange County, California and fondly remembers her own fourth grade field trip to the Mission. As a result, educational programming added to the Mission curriculum is based on her experiences as both a student and mother.

"I have been married here, have had happiness here, joy, and faith, and for me the rewards come daily." said Lawrence-Adams. "The preservation of the Mission means that my children's children can have a fourth grade experience here, and some day may reflect on the fact that their history is intertwined with this significant and special place."

It is easy sometimes to forget with all that happens at the Mission today that during 2005, a significant step forward was taken in creating a focus for the Mission's long term preservation. Mission San Juan Capistrano became the only mission in the State of California with an in-house Preservation Team comprised of full-time professionals with backgrounds in the field of conservation, preservation, and historic site management. Today, the Team includes a Preservation Manager, a Buildings Conservator, a Museum Conservator, a Historian, and an Intern from California State University, Fullerton. Leading the efforts are the Pastor, Board Members of the Mission Preservation Foundation and the Executive Director of the Mission.

Lawrence-Adams: "Members of this board, all of whom are deeply dedicated and committed to preservation of this place. They are incredible leaders, mentors and supporters that make serving this non-profit a joy."

These are important milestones to remember in the Mission's 233-year existence because a half a million visitors flow through Mission San Juan Capistrano each year to study the past experience and its renowned beauty. With its Strategic Plan firmly setting the direction, all who come to work or volunteer at Mission San Juan Capistrano understand that it is their duty to preserve the past in order to enhance the future.

About Mission San Juan Capistrano:

Known as the “Jewel of the Missions,” Mission San Juan Capistrano is a historic landmark and museum that boasts of quality permanent exhibits featuring original artifacts as well as traveling and temporary exhibits on a wide variety of topics.

The site itself serves as a living outdoor museum with original buildings constructed by Native Americans in the 18th century including the Serra Chapel, Great Stone Church, and the original padres’ quarters of the South Wing.

The Mission was founded on November 1, 1776 by Padre Junipero Serra as the seventh in the chain of the twenty-one California missions established by Spain, and is Orange County’s only mission. Every year, over 50,000 students visit the Mission and engage in an inspirational learning experience via the Mission Matters programming, as part of their State required California history studies.

Mission San Juan Capistrano is owned by the Diocese of Orange and is supported by the Mission Preservation Foundation, which is comprised of business and community leaders committed to ensuring the long term preservation and viability of Orange County’s only Mission. The Mission receives no funding from either the Church or the State of California and charges admission funds as a means of providing public access.

Mission San Juan Capistrano is located at 26801 Ortega Highway, San Juan Capistrano, CA 92675. Open Daily 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Good Friday afternoon. Admission is \$9 adults; \$8 seniors (60 years or over); \$5 children (ages 4 to 11); and children ages 3 and under are admitted free. Free audio guide with senior and adult admission. For more information, call (949) 234-1300 or visit www.missionsjc.com.

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