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For Immediate Release  
September 9, 2008

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# **From tragedy comes hope with Community Pool Groundbreaking**

## **Drowning deaths of three brothers sparked community response**

*Stanislaus County, CA* – The Empire Community Pool was inspired by a tragedy that occurred back in the July of 2003 where three young brothers (Eloy, José, and Daniel Yezpe) from Empire drowned in the nearby Tuolumne River. The tragedy inspired Empire residents, governmental leaders, and community partners to come together to create a safe place to swim. This initial concept was later expanded to also focus on family recreation and thus the water spray playground element was incorporated to accommodate the dual purposes.

On Friday, September 12, 2008, the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors will host a community celebration and groundbreaking ceremony for the Regional Water Safety Training Center – Empire Community Pool. The public event will begin promptly at 6:00 p.m. and be held at project site located at Empire Community Park near the corner of State Route 132 and I Street in Empire, CA.

The formal program will include remarks by individuals closely involved with this project from inception including elected officials, County staff and members from the community. The public event will conclude with the ceremonial groundbreaking, unveiling of the project sign and a tree dedication. The public event will be followed by a community celebration to benefit the Empire Pool Committee's fundraising effort. Performances by local musicians will also be incorporated throughout the festivities. Stanislaus County Police Activities League will also be on-hand to provide fun activities for the kids including face painting, recreational games, bounce house, scavenger hunt and a relay course. Stanislaus County residents and families are invited to attend this celebration.

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The Regional Water Safety Training Center - Empire Community Pool is envisioned as a safe recreational alternative for children and families where supervised swimming and water safety education can be provided as a deterrent to swimming in the areas many dangerous canals and rivers. The approved Regional Water Safety Training Center - Empire Community Pool will include a 5-lane 25-yard pool and a 706 square foot recreational spray playground. These aquatic components better achieve and address the needs of the Empire community and region. Furthermore, they enhance the two areas deemed most important to the community, swimming lessons and family recreation.

On May 20, 2008, the Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors approved awarding the Design-Build Construction Contract for this project to Diede Construction Inc. of Lodi, California. Partnering with the community and critical partners, Stanislaus County was successful in obtaining a \$1,000,000 grant from the State of California and \$200,000 from the Stewardship Council. Additional funding from the Tobacco Tax Fund, Public Facility Fees and private donations collected by the Empire Pool Fundraising Committee made whole the project budget for construction, three-years of operations for the facility, and one year of programming for recreational swim. The Empire Pool Fundraising Committee is exploring the creation of a non-profit organization to continue to support the operations and programs at the Regional Water Safety Training Center moving forward and is still actively conducting fundraising efforts.

The friends of the Regional Water Safety Training Center – Empire Community Pool include, but is not limited to, Congressman Dennis Cardoza, Senator Jeff Denham, the Empire Municipal Advisory Council, the Empire Union School District, the Stanislaus County Parks and Recreation Commission, the City of Modesto, Modesto Irrigation District, Turlock Irrigation District, the Stanislaus County Police Activities League and other local partners and private contributors.

Construction of the Regional Water Safety Training Center – Empire Community Pool is anticipated to begin in September 2008 with completion of the facility estimated by May 2009.

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