



Congressman's archives to open in Riverside

The late Rep. George Brown inspires new generation of explorers

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The gathering this week at one San Bernardino's newest elementary schools celebrates more than just its opening.

Named for former U.S. Rep. George Brown, the school like the man it honors is a monument to the American dream and to public school teachers who keep that dream alive.

During nearly 30 years representing the area in Congress, Brown championed science education and civil rights. Part of the 210 Freeway and the federal courthouse in Riverside also bear his name. It's especially fitting for a school to do so.

Brown credited public school teachers and his local librarian with feeding his reading habit and kindling his curiosity, a trait that came to define him as a national leader. "Why not?" became a question that drove his public service and his determination to break down barriers for women, people of color, and the disadvantaged.

Brown was born 94 years ago this month at home in a small house in the cotton and carrot fields a few miles north of the Mexican border. His father, 21, and mother, just 17, came west from Texas seeking better lives. Brown, the oldest of four kids, started school at age 5 in Redlands, where his grandfather picked oranges and his father, a construction worker, helped build the university.

The Great Depression hit Brown's family hard. Business at the family's service station and small restaurant dried up. Brown's father and uncle, who lived next door, would alternate paying the



At March 2014 grand opening celebration of George Brown Elementary School in San Bernardino, friend of the late Congressman and longtime advocate for civil rights and social justice **Jackie Goldberg** (returned by voters in 2019 to serve on the L.A. School Board) leads the audience in cheering Brown's example of tenacity.

George Brown Legacy Project director **Hans Johnson** assists students with preparation of decorations, including papel picado, for the big day. The school's team mascot, the **Explorers**, bears witness to Brown's leadership through nearly 40 years in Congress on space, science, and technology as well as his devotion to public education as a springboard for innovation, service to others, and fighting prejudice and inequality.

water bill so if one household was cut off, they could run a hose to the other's. A change of clothes was a luxury. New shoes were unheard of.

Brown truly never forgot the educators who nourished his young mind. Sixty years later, Brown would share in an Emmy Award for an ABC news show creating the first-ever debate between U.S. and Soviet lawmakers. He would become chair of the House Science Committee.

Still, Brown could recite his childhood educators with greater ease than the names of his contemporaries in Congress. In his 1989 oral history, recorded by Knox Mellon, Brown speaks lovingly of his Spanish, Latin, English, typing, and math instructor, Mrs. Kingsbury, who struggled in vain to find a college scholarship for which a 15-year-old high school graduate was eligible. Brown went on to junior college before entering UCLA at age 18. Looking back over his entire career, Brown singled out his hometown librarian, Ruth Klein, as the person most "central to my education."

Today, 15 years after Brown's death in 1999, his determination in asking "why not?" to overcome social and scientific challenges is regaining momentum. U.S. senators held an all-night debate on actions needed to avert catastrophic climate change, on which Brown held the first-ever congressional hearing in 1977. From Capitol Hill to Southern California, immigration activists are pressuring House leaders to pass comprehensive immigration legislation, modeled on reforms that Brown pushed through in 1965 and 1986, allowing millions of Americans to legalize their status.

Symbols alone will not repair the holes in San Bernardino's economy or public image, wrought by the recent recession and bankruptcy. But symbols that speak to our history, our hope, and our sense of common purpose hold immense power.

The opening of George Brown Elementary School is a reminder that investing in our youth and igniting their curiosity through education open a world of opportunity, for them and us. Even amid tight budgets, teachers and administrators are committed to building its library for kids age 5 to teen. All attendees at the grand-opening ceremony are urged to donate books. In that spirit, the school has adopted a team name in keeping with its namesake George Brown: the Explorers.

This column appears online at:

<http://www.sbsun.com/opinion/20140312/george-brown-inspires-new-generation-of-explorers-guest-commentary>

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