



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**March 5, 2010**

### **CONTACT:**

**Susan S. Muranishi, Alameda County Administrator (510) 272-6984**

### **ALAMEDA COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR SUSAN S. MURANISHI TOUTS LOCAL EFFORTS TO EMPOWER GIRLS AT WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATION IN SACRAMENTO**

SACRAMENTO - Alameda County Administrator Susan S. Muranishi spoke Thursday at a special "Day of Inspiration, Empowerment and Education" in honor of Women's History Month, highlighting County initiatives to empower young girls – particularly girls in the juvenile justice system or other "at-risk" girls.

Muranishi — who was introduced by California First Lady Maria Shriver — spoke during a special ceremony at the California Museum honoring Alameda County's Minerva Quilts Project, which allows teen-age girls incarcerated at the Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center in San Leandro to work with professional artists to create colorful artistic quilts depicting Minerva, the Roman Goddess whose image adorns the California State Seal. The project, which was inspired by Shriver in 2008, teaches the girls quilt-making and harnesses their artistic talents. It also offers them an important exercise in empowerment: each of the quilt-makers is asked to express Minerva's qualities of courage, strength and wisdom in their artwork, and to think of these qualities in themselves as they design and stitch together their creations.

"Minerva is clearly a great role model for all young women because her strength, compassion and integrity encourage us to be all that we can be," Muranishi said. "By launching the Minerva Quilts Project at the Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center, we are telling the girls there that their lives can be defined by more than their recent struggles, that we believe in them and that opportunities for a positive future are theirs for the taking." Muranishi also introduced the gathering to two teenage quilt-makers from Alameda County whose quilts are featured in a California Museum display on the Minerva Quilts Project. Both spoke, one reading a moving poem that she wrote about her life that brought tears to many in the audience. Two other teenage artists who are no longer in custody, attended with their mothers.

Shriver hosted the day-long Women's History Month celebration, which came just a day after she visited the Alameda County Juvenile Justice Center to learn more about the Minerva Quilts Project and to speak with young quilt-makers who are still in custody. The Quilts Project began at the Juvenile Justice Center in 2008 through a partnership involving the California Arts Council and the Alameda County Arts Commission, led by Executive Director Rachel Osajima. In 2008 and 2009 the quilts were prominently displayed at two Conferences on Women that Shriver co-hosted with her husband, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Many of the quilts still are on display at the California Museum, and more quilts created recently in Alameda County were added to the display this week.

In her talk today, Muranishi touted other ongoing efforts to help at-risk youth in Alameda County, including a program called New Beginnings that is giving paid jobs and vocational training to young people as avenues to adult success. Muranishi told the crowd in Sacramento today that note cards featuring colorful images of the Minerva Quilts are being sold at County-sponsored Fresh Start Cafes at the Juvenile Justice Center, the County Clerk-Recorder's Building in Oakland and the Castro Valley Library, raising funds for the New Beginnings initiative and providing a way the young quilt-makers can help peers who find themselves in difficult straits.

Shriver lauded Alameda County for its leadership, noting that it was the first county to establish the Minerva Quilt Project. Muranishi accepted Shriver's challenge to help expand the Minerva Project to boys at the Juvenile Justice Center and to work with other counties to establish projects of their own.