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Chinese Whispers: Sierra Stories Storytelling Event Shares Memories of Chinese Settlers in the Sierra Nevada

When: Sunday August 16, 2:30 – 4:00 pm

Where: Tower Theater, 421 Vernon Street, Roseville 95678

AUGUST 12, 2009, AUBURN –A unique community storytelling event is coming to Roseville on Sunday, August 16. From 2:30 to 4:00pm in the intimate setting of the Tower Theater, nine community tellers will recount stories that reveal glimpses of the early Chinese workers who lived in Placer County communities. A moderated discussion and a reception will follow the storytelling.

Hong Kong native Rene Yung has spent the last four years unearthing and documenting contemporary folk memories of the Chinese in the Sierra Nevada to produce *Chinese Whispers: Sierra Stories*®.

Between 1849 and the early 1880s, a quarter million Chinese came to California to work in the gold mines, railroads, lumber industry, fisheries and as migrant farm laborers. Between 1865 and 1869, over 15,000 Chinese worked on the Transcontinental Railroad from California to Utah, but there is scant record about them, and they are largely forgotten as individuals.

Yung interviewed nearly fifty community members who generously shared information and stories on the subject. From their stories a bigger picture emerged about the history of the Chinese in the American West. Yung then culled stories for the upcoming event. Rather than re-creating complete narratives, Yung chose to retain the fragmentary nature of her material, and composed them into a work intended as a poetic evocation that reveals traces of “what we will never know for certain about these early Chinese men and women who helped build the American West,” she writes.

Community storytellers include 90-year old Adele Bellmer of Loomis who will relate stories from her family, and Virgil Wong of Grass Valley who will be a proxy teller for elder members of the Wong family of Rocklin. Yung chose the community storytelling format to present her findings because she believes that it makes history come to life through authentic personal voices. She hopes that through this process, the community tellers become stewards of this overlooked part of their local history, and pass it on to the larger community as part of the living culture in the fast- changing Sierra Nevada landscape.

Rene Yung is an internationally exhibiting artist, designer and writer. Her cross-disciplinary works articulate the hidden and the overlooked by connecting community, history and place to address social and cultural concerns. She has exhibited at venues including TransCulture, part of the 46th Venice Biennale, and has conducted numerous community-based public projects.

Chinese Whispers: Sierra Stories is presented in collaboration with PlacerArts and was made possible in part by a grant from the California Council for the Humanities.

Tickets are \$15.00, and are available from PlacerArts’ online Box Office at PlacerArts.org or by calling (530) 885-5670.

PlacerArts is the Arts Council of Placer County, a non-profit, public benefit agency, and the designated state-local partner of the California Arts Council for the County of Placer.

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