

Hanford's Clark Center will close in 2015

By Donald
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A view of the grounds of the Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture in 2008. FRESNO BEE FILE PHOTO

The Clark Center for Japanese Art and Culture in Hanford, which for 20 years has provided world-class exhibitions, will close in July -- three years earlier than expected.

But when it closes, the center's celebrated collection of 88 trees are headed for Woodward Park's Shinzen Friendship Garden.

Willard "Bill" Clark and Elizabeth "Libby" Clark, the center's founders, gave the center's entire collection to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts in June 2013. Nearly 1,700 priceless objects spanning a period of 10 centuries, with an estimated value of \$25 million, went to Minnesota. Along with the center's collection, the Clarks offered their private collection in an arrangement that was part gift and part purchase.

When the donation was announced, Bill Clark said he expected the Hanford center to be open for five years with rotating shows curated by the Minneapolis museum.

But Monday's announcement set a firm closing date of July 1. A farewell exhibition will run Feb. 3-June 30.

The center's current exhibition, "33 Dances: Japanese Calligraphy from the 16th to the 19th Century," runs through Dec. 6.

Clark said Monday that the earlier closing makes sense.

"I'm 84, and we've been open in the Valley for 20 years," he said. "The collection is now in Minneapolis, and I think this is a good time to look forward to final closure."

With the Clark Center's closure, the central San Joaquin Valley will lose one of its small but impressive cultural jewels.

Clark in 2013 told The Bee that his decision to send his collection to Minnesota was bittersweet. "My heart is in the Valley," he said. "I'm fifth generation. But I have to be realistic. There isn't enough population in the Valley to support the museum."

He and his wife subsidized the center. But they didn't want to pass that burden along to their children. Plus, they were concerned about the expense of preserving the often fragile artworks.

The bonsai will be placed in the Shinzen Friendship Garden at Woodward Park in an arrangement with the Golden State Bonsai Federation, the Clark Center announced Monday. The federation maintains bonsai collections at the Bonsai Garden at Oakland's Lake Merritt and the Huntington Botanical Gardens in San Marino.

Bob Hilvers, the veteran bonsai curator at the Clark Center, will continue in that role at Shinzen.

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