



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
FRIDAY, MARCH 30, 2007

For more information, contact:

Mandi Semple, Alumni and Public Relations Coordinator

Phone: 925-362-7212

Email: mandi.semple@athenian.org

The Athenian School
2100 Mt. Diablo Scenic Boulevard
Danville, CA 94506
www.athenian.org

THE ATHENIAN WILDERNESS EXPERIENCE: HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS
COMPLETE 24-DAY TRIP TO DEATH VALLEY

The Athenian Wilderness Experience (AWE) is a graduation requirement for all students of The Athenian School, a distinctive San Francisco Bay Area college preparatory day and boarding school recognized for its innovative, challenging curriculum and unique programs. On Tuesday, April 3, 2007, between 1:30 and 2:30 pm, incoming members of the senior class who are currently away at AWE in Death Valley will return home to Athenian during the traditional event called "Run-In." Students complete this decades-long Athenian high school tradition of the AWE journey with an eight-mile run back to campus, where they are reunited with friends and family.

As a graduation requirement, AWE is usually completed at the end of the junior year or the start of the senior year, and it takes place during spring vacation in Death Valley or during the summer in the Sierra Nevada mountains. AWE includes extensive backpacking, navigation, first aid, low-impact camp craft, technical rock climbing, rappelling, peak ascents, natural history, a solo experience, and service. Students focus on promoting leadership, fellowship/teaming abilities, improving physical well-being, recognizing and acting upon individual strengths and weaknesses, and appreciating the natural environment.

Opportunities abound to develop human interactive skills by sharing responsibilities, making group decisions, taking care of one another, and realizing personal potential. The AWE journey normally lasts approximately 25 days and consists of a two-week period of traveling within a small group of about ten students, as well as a three-day solo period for each student.

AWE began at Athenian in the fall of 1969, four years after the school's founding by Dyke Brown in 1965. Dyke envisioned a school with the goal of Periclean Athens — the full development of each citizen. Intellectual growth, fitness of character, commitment to humane values, aesthetic sensitivity, and readiness for adult citizenship and leadership are Athenian's objectives for each student. The Athenian Wilderness Experience was a groundbreaking program at its inception in the mid-sixties.

The roots of AWE lie in the Outward Bound program, which is designed to build self-confidence, physical strength, teamwork, and an appreciation for nature through experiences such as backpacking, rock climbing, kayaking, and mountaineering. The philosophy of Outward Bound is divided into four categories: Challenge and Adventure, Compassion and Service, Character Development, and Social and Environmental Responsibility.

Outward Bound was founded by Kurt Hahn, a German man who also ran the high school that Athenian's founder, Dyke Brown, attended. Kurt Hahn was one of the 20th century's most influential educators. He said, "I regard it as the foremost task of education to insure the survival of these qualities: an enterprising curiosity, an undefeatable spirit, tenacity in pursuit, readiness for sensible self denial, and above all, compassion." He believed that outdoor education offered opportunities to teach and develop all of these qualities.

Influenced by Outward Bound and the philosophies of its co-founder Kurt Hahn, Dyke contracted with Outward Bound, and Athenian became the first high school in the United States—public or private—to include the full Outward Bound program into its curriculum. In 1978, Athenian brought this program in-house to make it more specific to high school students and named it the Athenian Wilderness Experience—or AWE. Given what AWE is geared to accomplish and provide for each student, the Athenian Wilderness Experience is the ideal environment for each student to learn and develop within themselves the traits and characteristics that Dyke had originally believed in when he founded The Athenian School.

Students and alumni who have experienced AWE often share how the journey made them stronger as people, emotionally and physically. "Many times throughout my life I have faced a challenge or difficult problem, and in those times I have drawn on my AWE experiences. Sometimes when I am facing a situation that seems overwhelming, I tell myself, 'I did AWE, so I can do this,'" said alumna Marnye Langer '81 about her Athenian Wilderness Experience in Death Valley in 1981. Athenian senior Alexandra Dunn, who completed the High Sierras trip in August 2006, had this to say about her AWE journey: "Now that it's over, I feel proud of what I accomplished. Not only did I survive those three days

of solitude, but I also hiked more than 100 miles through one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world.”

AWE is a unique experience for every student, one that gives to students as much as they bring to it. According to Head of School Eleanor Dase, “The Athenian Wilderness Experience is a transformative rite of passage for Athenian students as they develop greater confidence, communications skills and compassion. We are so very fortunate that Dyke Brown, who passed away in December of 2006, realized the importance of this unique educational program.”

The Death Valley trip is being led by AWE Co-Directors, Phoebe Dameron and Jason Ham, who took over the AWE program last year after long-time Director Arlene Ustin retired from Athenian. Phoebe and Jason are accompanied by AWE logies (or instructors) Liam Bowler, Greg Trotter, Kerry Larkey, Norm Eckman, Anders Fristedt, Brook Alloway, Kristin Anderson and Jennifer Walters. Athenian juniors on the trip are Yolisa Bam, Simone Burns, Ben Cerjan, Jamie Chang, Anny Chen, Ben Day, Nolin Deloison-Baum, Pantea (Pany) Faed, Danielle Goldsmith, Ariana Herrick-Kunitz, Garrett Hopper, Quinn Hubbard, Lewis Kane, Morgan Khodayari, Jeffrey Lai, Peter Lang, Bryan Lee, Erick Malver, Chris Martin, Sam Nejedly, Olivia Nelson, Samantha Okazaki, Josh Palmer, Kelly Park, Megan Patterson, Christy Payton, Allysia Ramirez, Andrew Rhim, Josh Ross, Cassandra Ryan, Guneet Sangha, Taylor Sherwood, Alec Solow, Jay Sukumvitaya, Eric Tsai, Nikhil Wadhvani, Jared Wiener, Nora Winslow, Grace Wu, Paula Yamamoto, and Yalda Yetka.

ABOUT THE ATHENIAN SCHOOL: The Athenian School is a distinctive San Francisco Bay Area college preparatory school, providing an outstanding education that is challenging, engaging, personal, interactive and international. With 457 students in grades six to 12, Athenian’s 75-acre campus lies at the base of Mt. Diablo in Danville, 32 miles east of San Francisco. The student to faculty ratio is an enviable 10:1 and the average class size is 15 students. The Athenian School is fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and the California Association of Independent Schools.

###