Dear Salutation,

“You can’t save it,” they said. “Just tear it down.”

The old white farmhouse had been part of the landscape at Riverview Ranch for more than one hundred years. It was built by Fresno’s first plant nursery owner William Macca Williams, and later owned by prominent Fresno banker and politician, William Walker Philips.

Riverview Ranch and its stately house served as an oasis for weary travelers on horseback.

The home provided living quarters for multiple families who worked in the vineyards and orchards on the property. By the mid-20th century, it had become nothing more than storage for grain. Time and neglect took their toll.

“I really do think it’s amazing that it has survived…”
- Coke Hallowell

It survived because of people just like you. This October, we are celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the opening of the Coke Hallowell Center for River Studies. It took vision and commitment to restore the old house.

And it will take vision and commitment to preserve this special place for the future, and provide ample opportunities for people to come here and connect to the San Joaquin River.
You can help us make progress right now.

That's why I'm writing to you today. Will you be a steward of the River Center? Will you make a special one-time gift of $100 or more today?

River Center is our short handle name for the Coke Hallowell Center for River Studies. The River Parkway Trust’s Board of Directors selected this name to recognize Coke Hallowell for her early vision to create an education center and include it in plans for the emerging San Joaquin River Parkway.

The idea came to Coke during a road trip. While traveling on Highway One near Stinson Beach, Coke noticed a beautiful old-fashioned house. The sign out front caught her attention because it marked the old house as an education center for The Audubon Society. “We should have an education center for the Parkway.”

Back home in the Central Valley, Coke continued thinking about the Audubon center. She regularly drove along Old Friant Road past the property known as Riverview Ranch. The property’s old farmhouse had captured her imagination. “We could restore it and create a place for people to come learn about the river.”

Plans for the 22-mile San Joaquin River Parkway were emerging. Riverview Ranch sat at the center of the planned Parkway reach. The education center could truly be at the center of the San Joaquin River Parkway.

There was just one problem. The Riverview Ranch House was about to be torn down.

In 1986 CalMat Company acquired the Riverview Ranch property and existing permits, which allowed for mining and demolition of the Riverview Ranch House.

Thankfully, CalMat’s District Manager, Russ Austin, recognized the historic value of the Riverview Ranch House. He convinced company officials not to demolish it and instead consider remodeling it for the company’s regional headquarters.

At the same time, Coke opened talks with Russ Austin and others about the historical role the Riverview Ranch House might play as an integral part of the San Joaquin River Parkway.

Key individuals came together for a meeting, held beneath the sprawling limbs of the 100-year-old camphor tree on site. They discussed potential partnerships and a vision for restoring the house. Some suggested that the house could not be saved. But those who held the vision pressed on.

Will you join us today and help carry the vision forward? Please make a special one-time gift of $100, or more. Your donation will support environmental education program growth, updated River Center facilities, and future river access.
The River Parkway Trust restored the historic home with help from numerous business and civic partners, generous donors, and hundreds of volunteers.

This dramatic restoration effort was made possible by a lead gift of land from Vulcan Materials Company (formerly CalMat). Embracing the vision of the property as part of the Parkway, the company donated the declining ranch buildings along with 20-acres to the River Parkway Trust in 2001.

Over the last fifteen years, hundreds of thousands of people have visited the River Center and discovered the rich history of the San Joaquin River. Coke’s early vision for an education center has come to life and has impacted the lives of many.

The River Center is a symbol of our history and an important part of our community today. A visit to the River Center reconnects visitors to their cultural past and draws them outdoors to discover the plants and animals that depend on the river.

Can we count on your support for the River Center today? Will you make a special one-time donation?

“This is for the kids...” – Coke Hallowell

Thousands of school-aged children visit the River Center annually. For many local children, a field trip to the River Center is their first experience in a natural setting.

It makes an impact. Last fall, during a Madera Unified sixth-grade field trip, an education docent was leading a group of students on a nature walk around the Hidden Homes Trail. As they walked along the trail they looked out across the pond hoping to spot a Great blue heron or turtles sunning themselves. The group stopped for a moment to just watch and listen.

As they began walking again, a student exclaimed: “This is just like being in Yosemite.”

And that’s why we need your help today! Please make a special donation of $100 or more right now. Your gift will support programs and projects that connect people to the history and natural beauty of the San Joaquin River at the River Center.

I’m writing to you today to ask you to help us continue improving the River Center. Together, we can carry the River Center vision into the next era.

Our vision for the River Center is to give voice to the story of the San Joaquin River and its people – by preserving a place and creating opportunities for the river’s water, land, and living creatures to be enjoyed and celebrated.
As a friend to the River Parkway Trust, you have demonstrated to me that you care about making our community a better place to live, work, and play. The vision for a 22-mile San Joaquin River Parkway of open space, trails, parks, and river access is going to do just that. And at the center of the Parkway is the Coke Hallowell Center for River Studies.

The River Center requires ongoing support for necessities such as our public water system (well), landscape maintenance, janitorial services, and public restrooms, in addition to larger repairs.

The River Center continues to operate thanks to YOU!

Please join Coke and others just like you by making a special gift of $100 or more right now. If you can do more, please be as generous as possible. If not, please find a number that’s right for you.

Every gift makes a difference. You can make sure people have a place to come and learn about the San Joaquin River. You can ensure that the River Center remains a vibrant destination for people of all ages.

If you haven’t visited the River Center recently, I invite you to come out for a tour. If you’d like to know more about additional plans for the River Center or the entire San Joaquin River Parkway please contact me directly at 559-248-8480 ext. 105.

Thank you for your support of the River Parkway Trust.

Sincerely,

Sharon Weaver
Executive Director

P.S. Your tax-deductible gift of $100 or more today shows your support for Coke’s vision to create an education center on the San Joaquin River Parkway. Give now using the envelope provided, or give online at www.riverparkway.org.