



The Jacob Journal

A Newsletter from Supervisor Dianne Jacob

April 2007

Addressing Trepidation Over Fire Consolidation

Jacob says fractured fire districts must reorganize for safety's sake

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El Cajon
La Mesa
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Serving the communities of:
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Granite Hills
Grantville
Guatay
Harbison Canyon
Jacumba
Jamul
Julian
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Lakeside
Mount Helix
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Pine Valley
Potrero
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When fire chiefs from a handful of East County fire districts requested to meet with me back in 1993, I figured the chiefs were seeking funding.

Decades earlier, County Supervisors had voted to stop providing fire and emergency medical services to unincorporated areas and had left communities on their own to fend for themselves.

The chiefs had more than funding on their minds that day. They wanted a better organization. They were struggling mightily with huge disparities in staffing, training, resources and facilities from agency to agency.

Would I support the merger of their districts to help ease those disparities with greater unity and better coordination, the Chiefs asked.

I would, but a majority of elected fire board members refused to give up what they perceived to be "local control" and the small reorganization effort lost its steam.

It took the single largest fire disaster in California history to lend real momentum to the concept of reorganization. 2003's Cedar Fire exposed the same inequities identified by chiefs a decade earlier: fractures run deep and wide among the region's 60

separate fire agencies. And, no area is more splintered than the Backcountry where 35 fire agencies— some staffed entirely with unpaid volunteers—respond to legions of medical emergencies and fast-moving wildfires that threaten the entire region.

With a push from top local fire fighting experts like the Fire Chief's Association, nudges from numerous Cedar Fire "after

action" reports, and a shove from the 81 percent of unincorporated area voters who approved a 2004 consolidation ballot measure, the consolidation process has reached a pivotal juncture.

The Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO), a State agency that oversees the creation of new

public entities, is reviewing a handful of possible consolidation models for the unincorporated area and may move forward with a preferred model next month.

As happens when parties are faced with a significant change in the status quo, several stakeholders are balking at the merger. They don't want outside parties dictating the number of firefighters, paid or volunteer, assigned to duty at stations night and day.

Above all, they question why financially sound districts should join forces with less funded agencies located dozens of miles away. Some parties remain unconvinced that legislation introduced by California Senator Dennis Hollingsworth and sponsored by the

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Fire

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County of San Diego truly represents long-term stable funding for a consolidated fire entity.

Fear of the unknown is a natural reaction to the change process. However, LAFCO needs differing voices to work out the nuances of consolidation. To walk away from the effort after nearly four years of grueling analysis is to cut short the possibility of greater safety. Only if parties remain at the discussion table will the best model be selected.

Certainly, a large part of that discussion has centered around consolidation's biggest obstacle: funding. LAFCO estimates that some \$40 million is needed to adequately fund an

unincorporated fire entity. In keeping with my past pledge to identify a long-term stable funding source, Senate Bill 806— which could be taken up early next year after LAFCO finishes its duties— corrects a gross inequity in the way property taxes are allocated in San Diego County.

Compared to the State average, local taxpayers have been paying more for education than other counties, at least nine cents more on every dollar. The State, which is legally obligated to fund education per child, has been allowed to shortchange our County. Fire protection and emergency medical services have paid the price.

SB 806 would shift one cent of local property taxes from schools to a new fire entity without harming schools. With language

that expressly protects schools from losing money, the bill forces the State to return a fairer share of our property taxes.

Already, the bill has touched off meaningful discussion about fire funding among the State Delegation, and remains, to date, the only proposed mechanism that would fully fund consolidation. I have been meeting with school officials to reassure them that schools will not suffer and plan to meet with others in the months ahead.

The passage of time should not weaken our resolve to learn from the Cedar Fire and address the failings exposed by its flames. All parties agree that greater unity among agencies is needed to fight fire. Greater unity is crucial during the change process too.



The ABCs of Childcare

Finding quality childcare is an often stressful endeavor for parents. A simple and

innovative new system promises to make the search easier.

This month, Supervisor Jacob will ask her colleagues to lend their support to State legislation that would create a safety ratings system for licensed childcare centers.

Like the safety rating system used by health officials to alert customers to the cleanliness of restaurants, childcare centers would be required to post ratings— good or bad — in a prominent place on their facilities. The State Department of Social Services would be required to list the ratings on its Website.

More than a dozen states already have a licensed daycare center ratings system in place. Supervisor Jacob thinks its time for California to follow that smart lead.



Fire Safety is Growing

For years, people who stroll through the beautiful exhibits at Cuyamaca

College's Water Conservation Garden have learned to create gorgeous landscaping without wasting precious drops of water

Now, the garden has teamed with the San Miguel Fire District to teach the public how to protect homes from fire. Supervisor Jacob was pleased to take part in the opening celebration.

During the 2003 Cedar Fire, homes with fire-resistant landscaping had a better chance of surviving than homes without it. Visit the Water Conservation garden at:

**12122 Cuyamaca College Drive W.
El Cajon**

www.thegarden.org

What's New?

Gaming Grants Make Communities Safer

A new fire engine in Boulevard, a new ambulance in Ramona and communications equipment in Alpine were among many projects funded this month with more than \$3 million in grants from Indian gaming revenue.

The grants, awarded to 21 community and public safety agencies, were finalized by a local committee that oversees the Indian Gaming Special Distribution Fund, a pot of money set aside by some tribes to help offset the impacts of casinos.

Very special thanks to the Barona Band of Mission Indians and the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation for participating in the program and serving important roles on the committee. Supervisor Jacob chairs the group.

For a complete list of projects funding by the grants visit www.diannejacob.com. Click on Press Box and check out the news release.

Revitalizing the Backcountry

Got ideas to make the Backcountry a better place? Join Supervisor Jacob at a Backcountry Revitalization meeting!

Friday, May 18, 2007 at 2:30 p.m.
Campo Senior Center
999-1/2 Sheridan Road, Campo



Rehab for No2Meth.Org

From toxic labs to bizarre violence to the abused children of users, meth has devastated our region like no other drug.

Now it's easier than ever to get information about meth, report meth-related crime or seek assistance for meth addiction at the revamped website www.No2Meth.org. Redesigned to be more appealing and more user-friendly, the site is a go-to resource for anybody struggling with the horrors of meth.

"The Strike Force believes in the power of the Internet to bring users back to health and cooks and dealers to justice," said Supervisor Jacob when the site's new look was unveiled last last month.

You can still call the meth hotline at 1-877-No2Meth. All calls are confidential.

Meet Our New Interns!



Seems like our interns get younger all the time! Welcome to the world

Kara Eryn (left), daughter of Chief of Staff Geoff Patnoe and his wife, Christine. And hello to Nicholas Ralph, son of policy advisor Erin Reed and husband Ty. Both families are doing great!

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We hope to hear from you soon!

March

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