



THE JACOB JOURNAL

A Newsletter from Vice Chairwoman Dianne Jacob

July/August 2008

It All Starts With Rural Fire

Serving the Cities of:
El Cajon
La Mesa
Lemon Grove
Poway
Santee

Serving the communities of:
Agua Caliente
Allied Gardens
Alpine
Barrett
Blossom Valley
Bostonia
Boulevard
Campo
Canebrake
Casa de Oro
Crest
Cuyamaca
Dehesa
Del Cerro
Descanso
Dulzura
Eucalyptus Hills
Fernbrook
Flinn Springs
Granite Hills
Grantville
Guatay
Harbison Canyon
Jacumba
Jamul
Julian
Lake Morena
Lakeside
Mount Helix
Pine Hills
Pine Valley
Potrero
Ramona
Rancho San Diego
Rolando
San Carlos
San Pasqual
Santa Ysabel
Shelter Valley
Spring Valley
Tecate
Tierra del Sol
Vallecitos
Wynola

Serving the Indian Reservations of:
Barona
Campo
Cosmit
Cuyapaipe
Inaja
Jamul
La Posta
Manzanita
Mesa Grande
Santa Ysabel
Sycuan
Viejas

Back in the 1970s, when the San Diego County Board of Supervisors washed its hands of providing fire and emergency medical services to the backcountry, many rural residents, including me, opposed the decision. We cautioned that if rural fire agencies weren't adequately funded, the region as a whole would pay the price in the form of Santa Ana-fueled wildfires raging into more urban areas.

The County's fateful decision to pull out of the rural fire protection business came home to roost in 2003 and to a lesser extent in 2007, when catastrophic wildfires burned huge swaths of the region and exposed dangerous shortcomings on the rural fire front. Communities considered ground zero for deadly wildfires struggle mightily with haphazard staffing and a dire lack of resources.

The safety of many rural residents who already pay additional fees for fire Protection— often hundreds of dollars a year per parcel— is jeopardized by inadequate fire protection on neighboring lands.

Catastrophic wildfire doesn't respect boundaries. It doesn't know when it crosses from a well-funded agency's territory into

the territory of a tiny, all-volunteer fire department. For this reason, fire safety must be viewed regionally. Territorialism and parochialism have failed us— twice.

Regionally, fire services remain divided up among so many separate fire agencies that no single authority is accountable for creating an implementing a comprehensive, countywide vision.

This is changing now. Our region is on a path to surrender its title as the only large County in California without a unified firefighting entity.

The County's commitment to spend \$15.5 million annually to consolidate rural fire agencies means stronger and better coordinated services at more than 50

stations throughout the unincorporated area. More than 1.5 million acres will fall under a single county fire authority; that's more than half the geographic area of the county.

What was a scattered network of unevenly funded agencies will become a more cohesive unit with standardized training and additional resources.

A new fire warden will oversee building and land use issues and coordinate brush management and weed abatement. Stipends will help strengthen our force of volunteer, career and reserve firefighters. Far flung stations will be staffed 365 days a year. The net effect is a seamless blanket of protection

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Consolidation

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in the areas where catastrophic wildfires start.

As happens whenever there is a significant change in the status quo, several fire agencies are balking at the merger. They don't want to lose local control over operations, resources and, above all, funding.

For most people, the destruction of the Cedar Fire and the Harris and Witch Fires is proof positive of the dire need for change. Surely, the best way to bring reluctant agencies on board will be the demonstrated success of the consolidated fire department. Now, more than ever before, the County is putting its money toward that end.

In addition to the \$15.5 million to stimulate consolidation, the County recently bought 30 new engines, tankers and other vehicles for rural fire agencies at a price tag

of \$7 million.

The decision to consolidate rural agencies is by no means the end. It's the first step toward the overall goal of an eventual regional fire authority.

Collectively, our region spends \$450 million dollars to fund fire and emergency medical services. With Orange County as our guidepost, a regional Joint Powers Authority would have the ability to bring together city fire departments, the County and unincorporated area fire agencies to eliminate duplication and look for cost efficiencies. We already know that dispatch services can be merged to save money and, more importantly, improve response times. It all starts with the rural fire consolidation now taking place.

The County has received tremendous accolades for spearheading rural fire consolidation. Some have called it



Unity: The County's commitment to spend \$15.5 million annually for rural fire protection means more resources in the backcountry.

historic. Others have called it monumental. I suspect, however, that longtime fire officials were likely thinking what I was thinking as the motion finally passed last month: "It's about time."

Getting Tough on Metal Thieves

The value of metals like copper and bronze are experiencing all-time highs. Sadly, metal theft is at an all-time high too.

It seems that nothing is sacred when it comes to what metal thieves will steal to sell for big bucks: urns at gravesites, manhole covers on local streets, even catalytic converters from cars and trucks. Recently, radiation treatment could not be performed on dozens of cancer patients because a metal thief ripped out copper plumbing that cools radiation machines in a local outpatient clinic!

Current law requires recyclers and scrap metal dealers to keep a written record of all items they buy and to properly identify those selling metal. The County thinks the public deserves even tougher protection and is supporting two State bills that place stricter requirements on scrap metal dealers and recyclers. SB 691 requires additional documentation of the metal seller and the material being sold. The bill calls for regular reporting to local law enforcement and requires payments to sellers be made after a waiting period. SB 691 also calls for a photo or video for every transaction and enacts extra fines for scrap metal dealers who repeatedly violate the law. Similarly, AB 844 requires that records of buyers be provided to law enforcement and also increases fines for those who knowingly buy stolen metals.



SENIOR SPOTLIGHT



Supervisor Jacob talks with famed astronaut Buzz Aldrin.

An Out of this World Afternoon

If you missed the County's Aging Summit several weeks ago, you missed the moon landing. Really!

Famed astronaut and keynote speaker Buzz Aldrin described the momentous occasion before a crowd of 1,800 of seniors in Mission Valley. At nearly 80 years of age, Buzz remains active in the pursuit of space exploration. He delighted the crowd with stories about his life and urged seniors to never stop learning. Supervisor Jacob, who joined with Supervisor Pam Slater-Price to initiate the Aging Summit back in 1998, had the opportunity to talk one-on-one

with Mr. Aldrin and reports that he's remarkably personable and wonderfully down to earth for a national hero. She sends her congratulations to Summit sponsors and organizers, particularly staff of the County's Aging and Independence Services, for another Summit well done! Thank you to Sharp HealthCare; AARP; At Your Home Family Care; Health Care Group; La Vida Del Mar/La Vita Real; Mount Miguel Covenant Village; Secure Horizons; SignOnSanDiego.com; and Silverado Senior Living.

Power Bill Buster!

Good news for seniors struggling to pay energy bills. The California Alternate Rates for Energy program (CARE) offers discounts of 20 percent to people with fixed or limited-incomes.

New income limits for CARE mean that more seniors are likely to qualify for reductions. A household with two or fewer people making less than \$30,500 a year now qualifies for assistance. For a household with four people, the limit is \$43,200.

To find out if you qualify call 1-(800) 411-7343.



Why stay at home and run your costly air-conditioning when you can go to a Cool Zone and meet new friends? Especially if you're a fixed-income senior watching every penny! Having

air-conditioned settings where seniors and others can congregate to beat the heat reduces individual energy costs and protects their health. Supervisor Jacob was thrilled to kick off another year of the County's summertime Cool Zone program, first begun during the energy crisis of 2001 in an effort to conserve energy and avoid sky-high bills.

There are over 130 Cool Zones in every corner of the region. To locate one near you, call 1-800-510-2020, or visit www.sandiego.networkofcare.org and click the Cool Zone logo.

Remember to Recycle your used batteries!

Wondering what to do with used batteries that can't go in the trash? The County's Department of Environmental Health is partnering with the County Library to provide collection containers at many backcountry libraries. Collection sites are available at libraries in Alpine, Campo, Jacumba, Julian, Pine Valley, Descanso and Portero.

For library locations and hours visit www.sdcl.org.



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