

# Good Government



## Fire Department Reorganization Finalized

The Fire Reorganization Plan was finalized and became effective July 1, dissolving 27 separate fire districts and merging them into a single fire protection district with four regional service zones. This reorganization created the San Bernardino County Fire Protection District, the parent organization that provides all administration, payroll, fiscal and support services, as County Fire's administration had done in the past. Four regional service zones were created, leaving functions unchanged, but securing property taxes on a regional level that will provide continued fire services well into the future. In addition, within the new fire protection district, existing special taxes that were created by special elections will remain in place. All revenue collected from each area will continue to be spent only within that area, and each will be identified as a Service Zone. The reorganization will continue to improve the delivery of fire services and the department's overall operating efficiency.

## County donates 16 pallets of donated goods to troops

In March the county concluded an enormously successful countywide effort to collect items for deployed military personnel, resulting in 16 pallets loaded with donations. The San Bernardino County Department of Veterans Affairs, which led the program known as "Support Our Troops 2007," worked with Bill and Diane Boone of "Touch of Home: Support 4R Deployed Military, Inc." to get donations to the troops. San Bernardino County employees and residents donated more than 50,000 items, including T-shirts, snacks, DVDs, and hygiene products. The donations were valued at \$250,000.

County provides full salaries & benefits to military members

## County provides full benefits to military employees

In 2008 the Board of Supervisors again went above and beyond the call of duty in providing full salaries and benefits to county employees serving in the armed forces. State law requires the county to pay employees on active duty full benefits and the difference between their county salary and their military salary for only their first 30 days of service. The board voted to extend the benefits and supplemental pay for as long as someone is assigned to active duty. The county began providing benefits and supplemental pay to active-duty military members shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The Board of Supervisors has renewed the program continuously since that time. Since the program started, 118 county employees have served on active duty and received the extended pay and benefits, which include medical, dental, retirement service credit and contributions, and leave accruals.



## County budget again garners international recognition

In 2008, for the second consecutive year, the county was internationally honored for being open and accountable to the public by receiving the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association of the United States and Canada. The award reflects the county's commitment to meeting the highest principles of

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governmental budgeting. The staff of the County Administrative Office works hard each year to create a budget that not only responsibly accounts for and allocates the county's assets, but also clearly communicates to the public what the county does with their resources. GFOA judges praised the county's budget document for being "outstanding as a communications device" and "very well organized, concise, and user friendly" – a notable task considering the document contains more than 700 pages.

### County helps families by holding the line on rate increases

In an effort to assist families as they cope with a national economic crisis, the county in 2008 announced plans to scale-back proposed rate increases for vital services provided through the Special Districts Department. Under normal circumstances, rate adjustments for various Special Districts services, such as water and sewer services in the unincorporated areas, would have increased by as much as 10 percent in some districts effective July 1 to support facility plant expansion projects, maintenance and the rising cost of utilities and fuel. However, in consideration of families already facing rising costs for fuel and other products in the face of declining property values and employment prospects, the Special Districts Department raised rates by no more than 3 percent in most of the districts it oversees to cover the cost of inflation. Rates were increased only to the degree necessary to maintain current levels of service and the fiscal stability of each respective district.

### Board adopts balanced budget with enhanced services

Despite a historic slow-down in revenue growth combined with an increasing need for county services, the Board of Supervisors in June adopted a balanced, on-time, \$4.3 billion 2008-09 budget. The budget allows for necessary increases in public safety and human services as well as maintenance of quality-of-life programs while not imposing additional burdens on taxpayers. "While other California counties and cities are being forced to cut services, raise taxes, lay off employees, deplete reserves and even consider bankruptcy, our county continues to meet the needs of our residents and build for the future," said then-Board of Supervisors Chairman Paul Biane.

### Supervisors name museum hall in honor of Hansberger



The Board of Supervisors in November announced plans to name the newest attraction at the San Bernardino County Museum after Third District Supervisor Dennis Hansberger on the occasion of his final meeting as a member of the board. The Dennis Hansberger Hall of Geologic Wonders is scheduled to open in the spring of 2009. The 12,000-square-foot, three-floor addition to the County Museum in Redlands will feature exhibits focused on the geologic history of the Southwest. During the meeting, Supervisor Hansberger was also honored by a long list of elected officials and public agencies for his years of service to the people of San Bernardino County. Supervisor Hansberger had been a member of the Board of Supervisors for 20 years, from 1972 to 1980 and from 1996 until the present. During that time he served as a strong advocate for the County Museum

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and other cultural and quality-of-life services for residents, a consistent voice for reform and ethics, a supporter of fiscal responsibility and accountability, and a proponent for countless essential projects in his district and throughout the county.

### Gonzales, Mitzelfelt, and Derry take oath of office

Supervisor Josie Gonzales began her second full term representing the Fifth District, Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt began his first full term serving the First District, and Supervisor Neil Derry began his first term as the Third District representative following Oath of Office ceremonies at the County Government Center on December 1. Supervisor Gonzales joined the board in 2004 and last month was re-elected to a second term. The Board of Supervisors appointed Supervisor Mitzelfelt to the Board in 2007 to fill a vacancy. Supervisor Derry was elected in June and succeeds Dennis Hansberger.

### Supervisors expedite construction of High Desert Government Center

In March, the Board of Supervisors approved an agreement with the City of Hesperia for pre-construction, design, and program management services that will cut at least six months off of the time needed to build a new High Desert County Government Center in the city. "Bringing this new facility to the Victor Valley will mean improved service and convenience for High Desert residents," said Supervisor Brad Mitzelfelt, who has led the county's efforts to plan, finance and build the new center. "The new government center will provide a variety of County services in one location – saving High Desert residents from having to visit multiple offices or drive to San Bernardino." The new government center will be a 55,000 square foot office building and is anticipated to house several county departments, including: Agriculture/Weights and Measures, Board of Supervisors, Fire Marshal, Human Resources, Land Use Services, Public Health (Environmental Health Services), Assessor, Public Works, Registrar of Voters, Treasurer/Tax Collector, and Veterans Affairs. Construction is expected to commence by late 2008 and be complete in early 2010.



### 2007 Fire Debris Removal Program

In October of 2007, the Grass Valley and Slide wildfires swept through San Bernardino County's local mountains, causing mass destruction in the communities of Fredalba/Smiley Park, Running Springs, Green Valley Lake, and Lake Arrowhead. After raging for days, the devastation resulted in the loss of 14,000 acres of land and 529 residences. With direction and support of the Board of Supervisors and the County Administrative Office, the county's Solid Waste Management Division oversaw a debris removal and clean-up program at no out-of-pocket cost to the fire victims. The clean-up program focused on environmental protection and community education with the ultimate goal being the clean-up and rebuilding of the mountain areas in a quick and efficient manner. The county's program is now being used as a model for a neighboring jurisdiction's own debris removal program.

