

San Bernardino County Sun (<http://www.sbsun.com>)

Give Big San Bernardino County campaign kicks off Monday

By Joe Nelson, The Sun

Friday, October 21, 2016

San Bernardino >> Give BIG San Bernardino County, an annual online fundraiser for local nonprofits, doesn't begin until Nov. 29, but the campaign kicks off 1:30 p.m. Monday with a ceremony in the Government Center rotunda.

Board of Supervisors Chairman James Ramos and representatives from local nonprofits are expected to speak during the ceremony. People can begin pledging donations Monday as well, but the online webathon is scheduled from midnight Nov. 29 to midnight Nov. 30, county spokeswoman Felisa Cardona said.

Donations can be made on the website www.GiveBIGSBCounty.org.

Last year's event raised more than \$265,000 for local nonprofits, with nearly 4,000 donations made to 144 nonprofits. Additionally, \$58,500 in prizes were awarded to participating nonprofits.

Give BIG is sponsored by the county and hosted by The Community Foundation, a Riverside-based nonprofit that provides grants to local nonprofits and organizes fundraisers such as Give BIG.

Monies raised during the event will benefit participating nonprofit organizations and the people they serve. Through resources provided by The Community Foundation, Give BIG also assists local nonprofits by providing them training in the use of social media, marketing and donor cultivation.

"That is the intent of Give BIG — helping nonprofits build capacity in new ways and helping them bring in new donors in new ways such as social media," Cardona said in an email.

More than 75 nonprofits have been confirmed so far, but there is still time for other nonprofits to sign up, Cardona said.

The San Bernardino County Government Center is located at 385 N. Arrowhead Ave. in San Bernardino.

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/social-affairs/20161021/give-big-san-bernardino-county-campaign-kicks-off-monday>

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San Bernardino County Elections Office welcomes election monitors: ‘We are transparent’

By Beau Yarbrough, The Sun

Saturday, October 22, 2016



SAN BERNARDINO >> Republican presidential candidate [Donald Trump has repeatedly told his supporters to go to different polling places](#) to make sure they’re “on the up and up.”

San Bernardino County Registrar of Voters Michael J. Scarpello welcomes that kind of scrutiny.

“We are transparent and welcome anyone who wants to come watch us at the central polling location or at the polling site,” he said Friday.

For security reasons, Scarpello would like election monitors to check in when they show up at election sites.

“We are very careful that we do not want anyone to disrupt the voting process or the poll workers,” he said.

During major elections, “about a dozen” observers spend time at the elections office in San Bernardino, most of whom were associated with political campaigns, political parties or city clerks. If that sounds like a lot, when Scarpello worked in Denver during the 2008 election, there were more than 2,000 registered poll watchers.

“In a presidential year, emotions are always much higher,” he said. “We’re always aware of that.”

In [his five years in San Bernardino](#), Scarpello hasn’t had any problems with elections observers, he said.

He’s also [not concerned](#) about the possibility of the election being “rigged,” as Trump has alleged. Among the security measures in place at the San Bernardino County Elections Office: None of the computers used to count votes are connected to the Internet, meaning those who wanted to manipulate the vote would need to physically break into the facility.

“We have been meeting with the FBI and our county IT has been meeting with the FBI” in an effort to make sure the election results remain secure, Scarpello said.

Although Election Day isn’t until Nov. 8, San Bernardino County’s 857,493 voters have already begun voting. [As of Thursday evening](#), 2,958 of the 503,516 vote by mail ballots issued have already been returned to the elections office.

Office staff is currently validating the ballots by comparing the signatures on the outside of the sealed ballots to the signatures recorded for that voter. The votes will begin to be counted starting on Oct. 31, eight days before the election. All votes received by Nov. 7 are scheduled be counted before polls close on Election Day. Those results are scheduled to be the first set of vote counts announced on Nov. 8 at 8:05 p.m.

Californians have until midnight on Monday, Oct. 24, to register to vote. Call 909-387-8300 or visit www.sbcountyelections.com for more information.

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/government-and-politics/20161022/san-bernardino-county-elections-office-welcomes-election-monitors-we-are-transparent>

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What San Bernardino County Museum is doing to plan for the future

Strategic planning process begins with workshop next month

By Kristina Hernandez, Redlands Daily Facts

Saturday, October 22, 2016



REDLANDS >> Nearly two years after it issued a report highlighting operational deficiencies at the San Bernardino County Museum, a team of experts is back to help the county create a plan to sustain the museum's recent successes.

Museum Management Consultants, a Bay Area-firm, has been hired to develop a "road map" for the museum's future, focusing on operations and finance, collections, exhibits and programming, and educational outreach. In November 2014, the same group issued a [report outlining 29 recommendations](#) to combat dwindling revenues and a downturn in museum attendance.

Many of those recommendations have been adopted in the past two years, and since the arrival of museum Director Melissa Russo, there's been a noticeable upswing in foot traffic. Following the installation of several [new exhibits and other activities](#) under her watch, the museum barely missed its attendance goal for the 2015-16 fiscal year. The museum hoped to welcome 55,000 visitors last year, but fell short by about 1,000.

This year, Russo said, the museum upped its goal to 57,000 visitors. Already, attendance is up by about 20 percent over the previous year, Russo said.

"I think more awareness and certainly social media has made a huge difference," she said. "I think people are seeing there are things going on."

To capitalize on that recent success and ensure it continues in the near future, the museum turned to Museum Management Consultants.

"They're really knowledgeable and we're excited to work with them again," Russo said.

MMC plans to talk with community members during a workshop next month, as well as with museum staff and county representatives, to develop the strategic plan. The process could take up to three months to complete.

The firm provides a variety of services, including guiding museums on how to be more strategic with their business models and visitor experience, said Adrienne Horn, MMC president.

"Our company is 28 years old and works throughout the United States with organizations of varying disciplines," she said. "We're very interested in seeing museums do well in their operations, and the people who work in our firm are people who have experience working in" the field.

Meanwhile, the San Bernardino County Museum Association is ready to lend its support to the strategic plan.

Association Executive Director Maggie Latimer said the group identified seven goals to achieve over the next year during a recent summit. Changing its mission statement is among those goals, she said.

“It’s really critical for the museum and the museum association to have a new plan in place because we do have new challenges and opportunities ahead of us,” Latimer said. “We need to be part of that process so we can all be successful in moving forward.”

Russo and museum staff are looking forward to MMC’s work and hearing the ideas brought to the table. Russo is aware, however, that it will not be possible to meet everyone’s expectations.

“But collectively we’ll get a good sense of where people want to see this museum go,” she added. “I think that’s going to be exciting, and it will be our jobs as staff and a county to listen and implement, and go into that direction.”

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/lifestyle/20161022/what-san-bernardino-county-museum-is-doing-to-plan-for-the-future>

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Lovinggood dominating Valles in fundraising

Monday Posted at 12:01 AM
Updated at 9:14 AM

By **Shea Johnson**
Staff Writer



San Bernardino County 1st District Supervisor Robert Lovinggood has brought in more than \$458,000 this year toward his re-election bid, dwarfing his competitor Angela Valles' fundraising efforts by a nearly 6-to-1 margin, campaign finance records show.

Lovinggood continued to pad his war chest during the latest reporting period. As one sign of his campaign's robust financial infrastructure, he received almost \$10,000 more in contributions between July 1 and Sept. 24 than Valles has all year. He also has taken out a \$150,000 personal loan, records show.

Valles' campaign has reported \$78,749 in contributions in 2016, buoyed by a \$52,000 loan from her husband and former supervisor candidate Rick Roelle, according to records. She's spent \$72,672 this year and maintains a \$43,186.89 cash balance.

She's received help from union groups like the International Union of Operating Engineers (\$5,000) and the United Food and Commercial Workers Western States Council (\$8,400), which represents more than 200,000 workers in California, Arizona, Nevada and Utah.

On the other hand, Lovingood has spent \$432,607.90 for the year and reported \$273,027.94 cash on hand. He's garnered financial support from Stirling Capital Investments, LLC (\$2,850), Omya, Inc. limestone quarry in Lucerne Valley (\$4,200) and fellow Supervisor James Ramos and his wife, who between the two gave Lovingood \$12,600.

Valles and Lovingood have also drawn contributions from known opponents of the other: Valles received \$2,000 from Gabriel Ayala, president of iLink Business Management, and Lovingood accepted \$4,200 from the Building Industry Association of Southern California political action committee.

A staffing agency that underbid Lovingood's ICR Staffing, Inc. in 2014 for the Upper Narrows Temporary Pipeline project, iLink had retained a law firm to issue a cease-and-desist letter to ICR and its attorney, accusing them of libel and slander. ICR's attorney rejected the claim.

The BIA, meanwhile, chastised Valles' push to increase the minimum lot size for single-family housing districts in Victorville while she was a councilwoman, concluding that the unprecedented move, which was ultimately scrapped, would have crippled economic activity in the city.

Valles has said she'll refuse to accept developer money during the course of her campaign, even going as far as to void a check sent to her, and she expressed confidence that money won't be a deciding factor in the race.

"If I can't get elected on my merit and for what I want to do for this county and who I am, well then maybe I shouldn't be in office," she said. "I don't want anybody to think that they own me."

Looking beyond business community backing, Lovingood said the sheer number of individual donations to his campaign has been an indicator of the "broad brush" support he's received from across the Victor Valley.

Lovingood and Valles will join the Daily Press for a candidate forum at noon Wednesday that will be broadcast on Facebook Live. The election is Nov. 8.

Shea Johnson can be reached at 760-955-5368 or SJohnson@VVDailyPress.com. Follow him on Twitter at [@DP_Shea](https://twitter.com/DP_Shea).



Commentary: Article misleads about immigration law, is unfair to organization

Sunday Posted

Oct 23, 2016 at 12:01 AM

Updated Oct 23, 2016 at 11:02 PM

By Bob Dane Executive director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR).

The recent (Friday, Oct. 21) article about First District Supervisor candidate Angela Valles's concerns regarding the resettlement of Syrian refugees in her community without public notification (Valles Angered over Syrian Refugees' entry into Victorville, October 20, 2016) misled readers about federal immigration law while also attempting to tarnish the reputation of one of the nation's oldest and most prestigious immigration reform organizations in the process.

Valles had good reason to be upset that Syrian refugees were resettled into Victorville without consultation from the federal government. In fact, pursuant to 8 U.S.C. § 1522(a)(2)(A), federal agents responsible for administering the refugee resettlement program "shall consult regularly (not less often than quarterly) with State and local governments and private nonprofit voluntary agencies concerning the sponsorship process and the intended distribution of refugees among the States and localities before their placement in those States and localities."

Either local officials were consulted in advance about the plan to resettle Syrian refugees in Victorville and have chosen — for whatever reason — to conceal that fact from the public, or federal law was ignored or violated. Either way, the

public has a right to know.

There are many widely acknowledged risks associated with resettling Syrian refugees, so Valles and other Victorville citizens should be rightfully concerned. In fact, NATO Commander General Philip Breedlove commented earlier this year that ISIS is using the flow of refugees as cover to infiltrate terrorists into Western societies. And the directors of National Intelligence, Federal Bureau of Investigation and the former director of Central Intelligence Agency along with the Secretary of Homeland Security, have all acknowledged that effective vetting of Syrian refugees is not possible.

The article also unfairly tarnishes the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), a national non-partisan organization that has 500,000 members across the nation. The charges against FAIR by the Southern Poverty Law Center, an organization that has a well-documented history of slandering political opponents, have been widely discredited.

Since the founding of the organization in 1979, FAIR has been asked to testify before Congress on more than a hundred occasions, on all aspects of immigration policy. FAIR representatives have appeared or been quoted in thousands of broadcast and print news reports, and our opinion columns appear regularly in major print and online publications. The organization has issued hundreds of reports covering every aspect of immigration policy, and those reports are widely cited by members of Congress and the media. Moreover, according to polls, our views on immigration policy are supported by the overwhelming majority of Americans.

Had the reporter bothered to contact us about either the refugee issue or the wildly unfair accusations about FAIR, we could have set him straight on both accounts.

Bob Dane is executive director of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR).



Majority of money for Bluecut Fire victims won't be available until November

Saturday Posted

Oct 22, 2016 at 3:07 PM

Updated Oct 22, 2016 at 3:24 PM

By **Matthew Cabe**
Staff Writer



WEST CAJON VALLEY — A majority of the money approved to assist Bluecut Fire victims won't be available until mid-November, but the dollar amount might only begin to scratch the surface of what's necessary to both spur and sustain long-term recovery.

In September, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors approved more than \$700,000 in assistance to victims of the fire, which burned 36,274 acres, destroyed more than 100 homes and cost \$18 million to fight.

But \$500,000 of that total will come from U.S. Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant funds, which Don Holland — 1st District Supervisor Robert Lovingood's policy advisor — said won't be available until Nov. 15.

“Because of (HUD) regulations, the county must wait 90 days from the date of evacuation in order to use the CDBG funds,” Holland told the Daily Press. “So the board also approved \$100,000 in discretionary funding to address the urgent and immediate needs of residents.”

County spokeswoman Felisa Cardona said an additional \$110,000 was authorized to cover the cost of roll-off bins to remove debris.

“Supervisor Lovingood, his staff and county staff are in the midst of planning efforts and volunteer outreach,” Holland said.

In early September, the U.S. Small Business Administration opened the Disaster Loan Outreach Center in Hesperia to help homeowners, renters and businesses affected by Bluecut Fire, according to county officials.

That center closed on Sept. 22, however, and only two loan applications have been approved thus far, according to SBA spokesman Gary Colton.

“Two were approved for a total of \$231,600,” Colton told the Daily Press. “They are for rebuilding or replacing the home that was damaged or destroyed. It also covers any lost personal property (such as appliances and furniture) up to \$40,000.”

Prior to the Bluecut Fire's containment, the county issued a statement that Gov. Jerry Brown “requested a federal declaration, which would have cleared the way for federal assistance to fire victims.”

The statement said the “fire did not meet the threshold for a federal disaster, and the request was not approved,” which prompted the state to combine the Bluecut Fire “with two other recent California wildfires in a request for federal consideration. But the federal government did not approve that proposal, either.”

But that information was inaccurate, according to Mary Simms, spokeswoman for the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Simms told the Daily Press the county “quickly revised the information,” and emails obtained by the Daily Press between a FEMA representative and county spokesman David Wert show that a Fire Management Assistance Grant was “the only request FEMA has received (and approved) to date.”

The approved grant will “reimburse 75 percent of the eligible firefighting costs” through President Barack Obama’s Disaster Relief Fund, a FEMA statement showed.

Cardona said the county later learned that the state had not made the request because officials knew it didn’t meet the federal threshold, which prompted the county’s correction.

But the approved funds will not cover relief to victims, thus forcing the county to “find money in other places,” according to Robin Bishop.

Bishop chairs the San Bernardino County Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, which Holland said has been working with the county and other nonprofits to help affected families by providing housing, food, water, clothing and debris-management services.

Bishop — who helped organize recovery efforts for Hurricane Katrina, Superstorm Sandy and in Baton Rouge after heavy rainfall left much of southern Louisiana submerged in flood water earlier this year — said VOAD was initially given free rein to conduct debris management on affected properties.

But after one week — with concern over asbestos contamination growing — the county restricted work to homes built after 1985.

“That limited us because most of the homes down there were built before 1985,” Bishop said. “I fought very hard with the county on that. I told them, ‘Whether you guys like it or not, they’re already putting stuff (containing asbestos) in your landfill.’”

VOAD was deactivated on Oct. 3, according to Cardona, because “the mission to coordinate debris removal could not move forward until properties were cleared for debris removal and asbestos.”

And on Oct. 12, the county required “all damaged structures within the burn area to be tested for asbestos” in an attempt to “guard against health and safety risks that could arise through the inadvertent disturbance or illegal disposal of asbestos materials.”

The county continues to look at different funding sources, according to Bishop. She said a partnership with the Inland Empire United Way means donations received will provide additional funding.

Inland Empire United Way President and CEO Greg Bradbard told the Daily Press donations total \$386,000 and will assist families with immediate needs. Additionally, IEUW began a collaboration with the Community Action Partnership of San Bernardino County on Friday, according to Bradbard.

“CAP will be providing the case management services,” he said. “So we’re encouraging anyone who’s lost homes or been displaced as a result of the fire to contact CAP and make an appointment. CAP Bluecut Fire case managers will then meet with those people and help the families.”

While much of the United Way donations were used to support the volunteer effort after the fire, Bradbard said the goal is to use the donations “for unmet needs that can’t be met by other sources” like temporary housing and property projects, including well repair.

He said United Way continues to receive donations, but not to the extent it did in the immediate aftermath of the fire.

“It’s definitely slowed down quite a bit,” Bradbard said.

And Bishop said the \$386,000 is not enough to cover the needs of victims.

“Unless there’s major fundraising,” she said, “there’s going to be a lot of needs that go unmet. When you don’t have that money coming in that makes it very difficult. The county is a poor county to begin with. Now it’s up to county to figure out what we can get and from where.”

But that is a statement the county might not wholly agree since counties do not receive funding to help disaster victims, according to Cardona.

“That is not one of the functions charged to county government by the state,” she said. “That’s what private insurance is for. Property owners who choose to not carry insurance run the risk of incurring huge expenses on their own. The only government assistance available to disaster victims is through FEMA, and that only kicks in when damage has reached a certain level.”

She added, however, that the county Board of Supervisors “has gone above and beyond what counties are charged with.”

“Had the Board of Supervisors not decided to use CDBG funds in this way, uninsured homeowners would have to do this work at their own expense.”

Still, Bishop said the county must acknowledge that recovery is a long-term endeavor, adding that the potential for flooding is a concern if winter brings rain and properties aren't cleaned up in time.

“It's a big scramble and issues will cascade,” Bishop said. “Things that aren't cleaned up will cascade into a flood issue. These things come in waves, and there are so many factors to consider. It's a mess and it's going to be a mess for a long time.”

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The psychology of disaster

Sunday Posted

Oct 23, 2016 at 4:36 PM

Updated Oct 23, 2016 at 4:36 PM

By **Matthew Cabe**

Staff Writer



WEST CAJON VALLEY — More than three months have passed since Michael and Sarah Choi lost the home they'd rented on a property here that was also torched, wiping out the fruits and vegetables they sold to make money.

In the weeks after the Bluecut Fire's containment, Sarah Choi, 70, was found sitting in the burned rubble of her home, speaking of ending her life, as first reported by Terri Hill in the Mountaineer Progress.

On Oct. 2, the tall task of restoring power to the property owned by Young Yoo — the Chois' landlord — was addressed in the Daily Press, with Sarah Choi's tearful face overwhelming the front page. On Oct. 13, she appeared again, this time on the front page of the Los Angeles Times.

Between the three reports, Sarah Choi became the face not only of Bluecut Fire victims, but of how a disaster can affect the psyche.

When Robin Bishop — chair of San Bernardino County Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster — and Marlene Kiemel — of San Bernardino County Emergency Communications Service — found Sarah Choi, she was sitting amid what was left of her home.

Bishop told the Daily Press that for her, being active in a disaster is “about getting on the ground and meeting with these people.”

“Mrs. Choi had suicidal ideation over this,” Bishop said. “I found her sitting in a pile of rubble talking about killing herself. I’ve annoyed everybody trying to get these people help. Thankfully we had Mike Antonucci. Thanks to him, we were able to maneuver things into place. He came up there himself to meet with them. That’s the kind of guy he is.”

Antonucci is the manager of the county’s Office of Emergency Services. Bishop said with his help, a crisis team was activated and Sarah Choi was sent to a hospital to receive proper care.

“There are some people who are so psychologically affected that they might not know what they need right now,” Bishop said. “They need to be guided. The bottom line is you don’t know what you don’t know.”

Studies have found that a paradox exists in research on traumatic stress, suicide and disasters, according to information released by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration last year.

Various research projects on disasters collected by SAMHSA showed that “although traumatic stress is a risk factor for suicide, and traumatic stress increases in the aftermath of disaster, in many cases suicide rates have not increased after disasters.”

A survey conducted after Hurricane Katrina, however, showed “significant increases in the prevalence of suicidal ideation and plans” one year after an initial post-disaster survey was taken.

The team that conducted the second survey, according to SAMHSA, attributed the increases “to the fact that stressors associated with the hurricane remained common at the time of the follow-up, which was nearly two years after the hurricane. The persistence of these stressors may have led to the increases they saw.”

It’s one reason why Bishop emphasizes the importance of long-term and whole-community recovery.

“From the little kid all the way up,” Bishop previously told the Daily Press. “And so as we transition into recovery, it’s absolutely critical that we have that whole community approach. They’re invested and they have augmented resources come in. They need help because a lot of people don’t know about recovery. And so we’re trying to guide them and help the best we can.”

Bishop said what people have trouble thinking about with recovery is that it's “a holistic process.”

“The psychological is involved,” she said. “A lot of medical conditions have been exacerbated by this disaster. There are a lot of pieces to this puzzle.”

San Bernardino County spokeswoman Felisa Cardona told the Daily Press the county is aware that victims “have suffered significant losses and trauma” as a result of the Bluecut Fire.

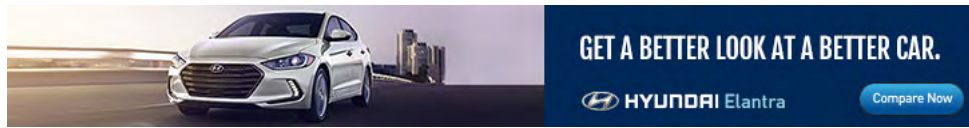
“We have dispatched our Department of Behavioral Health to assist fire victims throughout this process,” Cardona said.

Cardona added that DBH staff will attend an open house scheduled for 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Nov. 5 at Phelan Elementary School.

The open house was organized to educate victims on the assistance available to them for removing asbestos and debris from their property.

“(Staff) will be available at the open house for any victims who need counseling,” Cardona said. “DBH has provided counseling services to the victims during and since the fire.”

Matthew Cabe can be reached at MCabe@VVDailyPress.com or at 760-951-6254. Follow him on Twitter @DP_MatthewCabe.



Thousands of Marijuana Plants Seized in San Bernardino County

More than 3,700 plants were recovered in the multi-agency investigation.

By Rudy Chinchilla



Nearly 4,000 marijuana plants were seized and one suspect was arrested in a multi-agency investigation in San Bernardino County on Friday, Oct. 21, 2016.

Nearly 4,000 marijuana plants were seized and one suspect was arrested in a multi-agency investigation in San Bernardino County on Friday.

The seizure, which resulted in eight search warrants and 3,700 marijuana plants being seized, was an effort by three different agencies focusing on the unincorporated communities of Newberry Springs and Daggett, according to the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department.

- [LA Dodgers Star Refused to Stay at Trump Tower With Team](#)

In addition to the plants, authorities also recovered over 50 pounds of processed marijuana.

The county's Commercial Cannabis Ordinance prohibits marijuana cultivation and commercial marijuana activities. Violation of the ordinance is a felony.

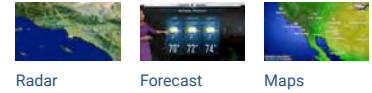


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All the cultivation operations were also "illegal and not in compliance with California medical marijuana laws," sheriff's officials said.

Authorities arrested one person, Thanh The Dies. Investigators are in the process of identifying and charging other suspects.

- **Halloween Treat: A Night in Dracula's Castle**

The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department Marijuana Enforcement Team, the California National Guard Counterdrug Task Force, and the San Bernardino County Land Use Services Department conducted the investigation.

Published at 8:08 PM PDT on Oct 22, 2016 | Updated at 8:45 PM PDT on Oct 22, 2016



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TOWN HALL FORUM: Mountain Communities Preparedness Open House

in [News](#), [Ticker](#) / by [Michael P. Neufeld](#) / on October 22, 2016 at 12:04 am /

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One of the many exhibits on display at the October 25 Mountain Communities Preparedness Town Hall event at the Lake Arrowhead Resort and Spa will be the seismic simulator. The free event starts at 6 p.m. (Photo by San Bernardino County Fire)

By Michael P. Neufeld

Lake Arrowhead, CA – The Mountain Communities Preparedness Town Hall Forum and Open House begins at 6 p.m. at the Lake Arrowhead Resort and Spa. Come and gather information about overall disaster preparedness including fire, earthquake and winter weather preparedness.



The Old Fire started on October 25, 2003 and burned 91,281 acres, destroyed 993 homes and caused 6 deaths. (File Photo)

Over 20 agencies and organizations will be on hand to share up-to-date preparedness information.

The Town Hall Forum portion of the evening will begin at 6:30 p.m. with the completion of audience questions and answers by 8 p.m. Speakers for the Town Hall Forum will be representing CalTrans, CHP, County Fire, County Sheriff, County Public Works and the office of Second District Supervisor Janice Rutherford.

PARTICIPATING AGENCIES/ORGANIZATIONS

Here is a partial list of the agencies or organizations scheduled to participate: American Red Cross; Arrowhead Fire Safe Council; Big Bear Valley CERT; Big Bear Valley COAD; CALFIRE; CalTrans; Central Mountain SB County Fire/ECS; California Highway Patrol; Mountain CERT; Mountain Rim Fire Safe Council; National Weather/SkyWarn; Rim Communities COAD, and the SB County Fire Office of Emergency Services.



A CalTrans plow clears a state highway during a winter storm. (File Photo)

Others set to participate: SB County Fire; SB County Public Works; SB County Sheriff & Citizens On Patrol; Simpler Life; Sempra; Southern California Edison, and the U.S. Forest Service.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Lake Arrowhead Resort and Spa is located at 27984 Highway 189 in Lake Arrowhead.

For additional information contact San Bernardino County Fire Office of Emergency Services at (909) 356-3998.

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 humidity: 96%
 wind: 2mph SE
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64° TUE	71° WED	75° THU	68° FRI	73° SAT
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Weather from OpenWeatherMap

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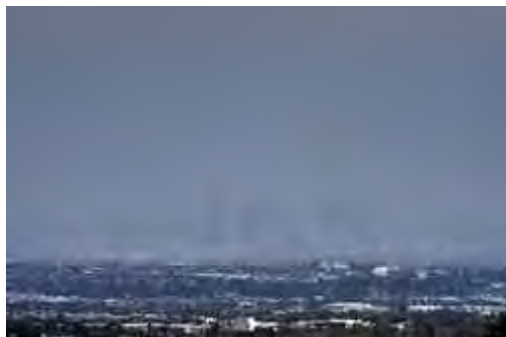
San Bernardino County Sun (<http://www.sbsun.com>)

Air quality agency may scrap cap-and-trade program

Market-based system's effectiveness in cutting pollution is questioned

By David Danelski, *The Press-Enterprise*

Sunday, October 23, 2016



Southern California's cap-and-trade marketplace that's been used for 22 years to limit air pollution from the region's top 275 industrial polluters may be scrapped.

Under pressure from federal and state regulators, and a lawsuit from a coalition of environmental groups, officials with the South Coast Air Quality Management District are considering phasing out the once-ballyhooed program that gave industry the choice between buying pollution credits or installing pollution controls.

The change in thinking comes as the air district prepares a 15-year plan to cut pollution to meet looming deadlines to meet the federal health standards for smog that must be approved by state regulators.

Philip Fine, the air district's deputy executive officer, said in an interview that the air district's Regional Clean Air Incentives Market, or Reclaim, may have outlived its effectiveness because meeting health standards in the coming years may require nearly all the oil refineries, power plants, and factories in the program to install state-of-the-art pollution controls. That leaves little room for the give and take of a cap-and-trade marketplace.

"We need to assess the benefits of returning to command and control," said Fine, referring to traditional regulations that require polluting facilities to meet specific emissions reductions.

The air district has a long way to go to meet the health standards.

It missed a 2015 federal deadline for the cleanup of fine-particle pollution associated with heart disease and various other health problems. And this year, the region so far has weathered 131 days that exceeded the health standard for lung-searing ozone. The region must meet one federal standard for ozone by 2023 and a tougher one in 2031.

The nitrogen-oxides targeted by the Reclaim program react with other pollutants in the atmosphere to form both ozone and fine particle pollution.

Pollution marketplace

Reclaim was sought by industry in the early 1990s and hailed by its supporters as a win for both businesses and the environment. Many environmentalists were suspicious and opposed it from the beginning.

Each polluting facility was allotted credits that allow a specific amount of nitrogen oxide emissions each year. Companies that reduce pollution are left with extra credits, which they can sell to other companies that want to increase emissions.

This gave individual companies flexibility, while the air district periodically required pollution drops among the entire group of facilities within the marketplace.

But the program has not always gone well.

In 2001, power plants were temporarily taken out of the market because they couldn't acquire enough credits to avoid blackouts.

The program later had trouble meeting its cleanup goals.

In 2005, the air district approved changes in the program designed to cut emissions from Reclaim facilities by 7.7 tons a day by 2012. But during those seven years, the reduction was only 4 tons, and more than half of the reductions came from the shutdown of facilities.

Also in 2005, the air district staff expected that the program would spur the installation of catalytic pollution controls on 51 refinery boiler or heater units by 2011. But only four were installed, and those were done at the behest of enforcement actions by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, said an air district report.

Late last year, the air district staff proposed making up for lost ground by cutting the emissions by 14 tons a day by 2022. But industry officials objected, and the air district's governing board approved a less-stringent goal of 12 tons.

That decision prompted a harshly worded Jan. 7 letter from Richard W. Corey, the executive officer of the California Air Resources Board. He wrote that the 12-ton reduction "falls short of what is needed" to meet federal and state health standards and does not appear to comply with state law.

In his letter, Corey said that he had directed his staff to assess whether the air district is meeting its legal obligations.

State air board spokeswoman Melanie Turner said in an email that the state assessment has not been completed, and the state air board still has the same concerns raised in the letter.

The EPA raised similar concerns in a March letter to the air district, saying that many of the Reclaim facilities are not required to use the best-known technologies for reducing emissions. But air district officials said the changes to the plan approved in December already had addressed those concerns.

Command and control

Meanwhile, a pending lawsuit filed by a coalition of environmental groups in Los Angeles County Superior Court demands that Reclaim be replaced with traditional "command and control" regulations, arguing that the district is not meeting its obligation to protect public health.

"As a program designed by industry for industry, it has helped the region's biggest polluters continue profiting from pollution, at the public's expense," said Adrian Martinez, an attorney for Earthjustice, one of the plaintiffs. "I urge the air district to abandon this broken system."

The program is particularly beneficial to oil refineries, Martinez said. These facilities put out 59 percent of the nitrogen oxide emissions of all the Reclaim facilities.

Officials with the Western States Petroleum Association, which represents the refinery owners, declined to be interviewed.

The industry group instead provided a prepared statement from Catherine Reheis-Boyd, the association president. It said that Reclaim resulted in 69 percent emission reductions since 1994. The participating facilities "have invested billions of dollars to achieve these reductions year after year."

Martinez contends that too many pollution credits are available in the marketplace, giving polluters, particularly oil refineries, a less-expensive option to installing pollution controls.

Another problem, he said, has been companies selling their excess credits generated from plant shutdowns or downsizing.

Closure windfall

Consider the CalPortland Cement plant in Colton.

In 2009, the company closed its cement-making kilns there, and the Inland plant stopped being one of Southern California's biggest emitters of nitrogen oxides.

But its pollution legacy lives on, despite the loss of 94 jobs.

At the time of the plant's closure, CalPortland was left with enough pollution credits to emit 2.5 tons a day of nitrogen oxides, which is roughly 10 percent of all emissions allowed for the Reclaim facilities.

CalPortland sold these pollution credits, mostly to oil refineries operating in Los Angeles County, bringing the cement company \$82.3 million in windfalls, according to the air district.

This, in turn, allowed companies that bought the credits, including ExxonMobile, Chevron, and Ultramar, to put off adding available pollution controls to their refineries.

The air district's Fine said that new rules approved this month will prevent such plant closure windfalls in the future. These rules now limit the amount of credits that can be sold when a plant is shut down.

Fine also said that if the Reclaim program survives, it would need to slash an additional 5 tons of nitrogen oxides by 2031.

And what becomes of the program is far from settled.

While Earthjustice's Martinez calls it a "Ponzi scheme" for polluters, the Western States Petroleum Association says in its statement that the group "looks forward to working collaboratively with the district on future discussions about the Reclaim program and air-quality policies that benefit Southern California residents."

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/environment-and-nature/20161023/air-quality-agency-may-scrap-cap-and-trade-program>

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Feed store saved after massive hay pile catches fire

Sunday Posted Oct 23, 2016 at 12:13 PM
Updated Oct 23, 2016 at 4:40 PM

By Staff Reports

HESPERIA — A massive pile of hay became fully involved in flames just before 1 a.m. Sunday, but firefighters arriving on scene were able to contain the two-alarm fire before it could reach the nearby J and K's Feed and Vet Supplies, officials said.

The incident was reported by multiple parties beginning at 12:56 a.m.

Fire crews were dispatched to the 16300 block of Yucca Street, where en route they witnessed, from miles away, "a large column of smoke and flames," San Bernardino County Fire officials said in a statement Sunday.

Once on scene, fire personnel saw a 10-foot-high pile of hay, covering roughly 100 feet by 100 feet of ground, engulfed in flames.

"Initial crew priorities were to protect the immediate structures exposed to the west and south that included the feed store and gas station," officials said. "Large diameter hose lines as well as master streams were placed into service from engine and aerial truck ladders."

Firefighters quickly mitigated the nearby structures' exposure to the blaze and the buildings ultimately sustained no damage. But the hay fire took about 45 minutes to completely knock down and, "due to the size and density of the pile," crews followed up with an extensive mop-up and overhaul operation.

As progress continued to be made, the nine engines and two truck companies assigned to the incident were released and replaced with an inmate hand crew and bulldozer to ensure the fire was completely out, officials said. Crews remained on scene throughout the wee hours of Sunday to monitor the scene.

Forty firefighters responded to the fire and there were no reported injuries to either fire crews or civilians.

The blaze was being investigated by County Fire.



Officials investigating commercial fire as 'suspicious'

Sunday Posted Oct 23, 2016 at 10:45 AM
Updated Oct 23, 2016 at 4:37 PM

By Staff Reports

VICTORVILLE — Firefighters knocked down a "suspicious" blaze late Friday at an unoccupied commercial business, thwarting the progress of flames before they could tear through attic space or the interior portion of the building, officials said.

The fire was reported at 7:20 p.m. to the rear of a two-story building in the 14000 block of Culley Court. San Bernardino County Fire Medic Engine 311 arrived on scene in roughly four minutes where crews found the exterior stairwell landing ablaze.

"Crews initiated an aggressive offensive attack with a quick knock down of the exterior fire," officials said in a statement early Sunday. "Fire had extended into the second story through two rear doors. Firefighters forced entry and stopped the progress of the fire before it could become established in the commercial attic space or interior portion of the building."

Crews cleared both stories of the building of smoke through horizontal ventilation. Investigators were called to the scene and the incident is currently being investigated as suspicious in nature.

Twenty-one fire personnel were involved in knocking down the blaze. There were no injuries reported to either firefighters or civilians.

Anyone with information regarding this incident is asked to contact San Bernardino County's Office of the Fire Marshal at 800-468-4408.

‘Spy Pilot Chronicles’ come to San Bernardino airport

Legendary SR-71 Blackbird pilot shares stories from 81,000 feet up Evening with Brian Shul at San Bernardino International Airport Nov. 5 to provide funds for Norton Air Force Base Museum

By Michel Nolan, The Sun

Saturday, October 22, 2016



He has flown at 2,000 miles per hour, outmaneuvered missiles over Libya, and marveled at the Milky Way close-up.

On Nov. 5, he will bring his amazing “Spy Pilot Chronicles” to San Bernardino International Airport’s Departure Terminal.

This special evening with legendary SR-71 Blackbird pilot Brian Shul is a fundraiser for the nonprofit Norton Air Force Base Museum.

This nationally acclaimed Blackbird show features a talk by Brian, rare photos and video footage of the top secret SR-71, as well as an

autograph session with the pilot who is author of the best seller “Sled Driver,” the single-most popular book on that plane worldwide.

The show should be of special interest in the Inland area since so many locals actually worked on the SR-71 spy plane program, which was here for many years, said Bob Edwards, Norton AF Base Museum board president and 63rd/445th Norton Veterans Group president.

“This was a highly classified program and the base played a big part in the overall support of the airplane and its worldwide mission. Only those who worked on this classified program knew of its existence — now, more than 22 years after the base closed and the SR-71 program ended, we can talk of its existence,” he said.

This entertaining show is family-friendly, celebrating the most remarkable plane of the 20th century — and a man with a will of iron.

His is an inspiring comeback story.

It entertains, informs and uplifts.

“My story goes from laying there nearly dead in the jungles of Vietnam to flying the world’s fastest jet,” Brian told me.

He was shot down near the Cambodian border in 1973 after 212 close air support missions.

Burned on over 60 percent of his body, Brian was given little chance of survival. He spent one year in hospitals, endured 15 reconstructive surgeries and countless hours of physical therapy.

How could he make a decision to fly again?

“When you lie on your back for a year, you get in touch with what’s important in life and yourself and you learn that you have an inner strength greater than any muscles in your body ever provided,” he said. “I was highly

motivated to get back to flying, even though I knew there was a one-in-a-thousand chance.”

But he surprised all the doctors and returned to flying jets.

He flew the A-7 and was in the first A-10 squadron, becoming an airshow demonstration pilot and teaching at the Air Force’s Top Gun School.

He culminated his Air Force career when he was selected to fly the world’s premier spy plane, the SR-71.

This was a remarkable accomplishment considering that it required an astronaut physical to qualify for the plane that routinely flew above the earth’s atmosphere about 95 percent of the time.

Brian flew the Blackbird for four years and was the pilot who provided key photos of terrorist camps to President Ronald Reagan during the Libyan crisis in 1986 when he became the only SR-71 pilot ever to fly three missions in three consecutive days.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the jet.

Only about 35 2-seater SR-71s were built, and only 93 men in history got to fly it — and only one man carried a camera around when he flew the “sled,” the affectionate name pilots gave the SR-71.

Brian, a retired Air Force Major, shares the story of a conversation he had in the cockpit with his reconnaissance systems officer, Maj. Walt Watson, who rode four feet behind him, working all the cameras, radios and electronic jamming equipment.

“I joked that if we were ever captured, he was the spy and I was just the driver. He told me to keep the pointy end forward,” Brian said.

After 20 years as an Air Force fighter pilot, from 1970 to 1990, Brian today is an accomplished author, speaker and photographer.

The 68-year-old who was born in Quantico, Virginia, is the son of a 32-year U.S. Marine veteran. It took only two years for him to write “Sled Driver,” the first of his four aviation books, for which he did all the flying, writing and photography.

Brian is the only man in America to have flown extensively with both the Air Force Thunderbirds and Navy Blue Angels in the making of those books.

He is the owner of Gallery One in Marysville where his nationally acclaimed nature photography is on display.

San Bernardino International Airport on Nov. 5 — perfect time to meet a hero.

What you need to know before you go

- What: Fundraiser: Night at the Museum, “Spy Pilot Chronicles”
- Who: Air Force Maj. (ret.) Brian Shul
- When: 5:30 to 8 p.m. Nov. 5
- Where: San Bernardino International Airport, Departure Terminal, 105 Leland Norton Way, San Bernardino
- Cost: \$25 advance ticket donation, online at NAFBMUSEUM.org; \$30 at the door donation; fundraiser benefits nonprofit museum
- Information: Call 909-382-7307 or email NAFBmuseum@gmail.com

- What else: Pilot autograph session will follow show

Michel Nolan appears in The Sun on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Reach her at mnolan@scng.com or on Twitter @MichelNolan.

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20161022/spy-pilot-chronicles-come-to-san-bernardino-airport>

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J.C. Penney returns to San Bernardino after 13-year absence

By Jim Steinberg, The Sun

Friday, October 21, 2016



SAN BERNARDINO >> About 1,000 people were waiting for an event that plugs an unsightly wound visible from the 215 Freeway, provides jobs for 207 and brings more sales tax revenue to the city.

J.C. Penney Co. on Friday officially opened in Inland Center mall with a 119,000-square-foot, two-level store that will offer popular private-brand clothing and footwear, a Disney shop, cosmetics, fragrances, a hair salon, eyeglasses, as well as household appliances.

“J.C. Penney first opened in San Bernardino in 1916, and although we departed for a brief period, we’re proud to become reacquainted with the city we first met 100 years ago,” said Paul Mutshnick, the store’s

general manager, prior to the ribbon cutting Friday morning.

In 2003, J.C. Penney closed its location in Carousel Mall as the last surviving anchor in a once-thriving mall that previously had seen the closure of Montgomery Ward and The Harris Co.

The new J.C. Penney occupies the freeway-visible space once occupied by Gottschalks, which went out of business in 2009.

“It was sad to see that space empty,” said City Councilwoman Bessine L. Richard. “Now the red (sign for J.C. Penney) just pops.”

Born and raised in San Bernardino, Richard said she enjoyed shopping at the J.C. Penney in San Bernardino.

“This is a great day in San Bernardino and all of you being out here means that we are going to spend our dollars and make this a healthy store and the healthiest community in the state of California,” Assemblywoman Cheryl R. Brown, D-San Bernardino, said to the crowd gathered prior to the ribbon cutting.

Since leaving San Bernardino, J.C. Penney has realized it has a hole in its coverage, Joe McFarland, executive vice president of stores, said in an interview.

“This is a premier spot, and this is where we want to be,” he said.

J.C. Penney “put its best foot forward” with the store, its decor and product mix, including the Plano, Texas-based company’s new push to bring back appliances after a 30-year absence, he said.

This year, roughly half of J.C. Penney’s more than 1,000 stores have appliances, he said.

Of the 207 employees, only six were brought in from somewhere else. “The rest were hired from the San Bernardino area,” McFarland said.

“It’s good to see that San Bernardino is slowly and steadily bouncing back from the recession,” said Jennifer Avila, 23, a cybersecurity major at Cal Sate San Bernardino.

“This is worse than Black Friday,” Avila said of the crowded store, alluding to throngs of customers that crowd retailers for day after Thanksgiving sales.

“It’s a big and bright store, a lot bigger than the (J.C. Penney) in Redlands,” said Jeanette Avila, Jennifer Avila’s mother.

“Good to see another store come to San Bernardino,” Jeanette Avila said.

More than a few shoppers arrived in front of the store as early as Thursday afternoon. The attraction for the early arrivals was the promise of a \$100 gift card.

“We like to shop and spend money and this is free money,” said Shaniquwa Tucker, 22, who, along with six members of her San Bernardino family, were in front of the store from 5:30 p.m. Thursday until its 10 a.m. Friday opening.

Dinora Martinez of San Bernardino, who was holding a deeply discounted blender in the long line of people waiting to check out, said, “I’m very happy with this. ... The store exceeded my expectations.”

J.C. Penney brought in telenovela star Maite Perroni of Mexico City to sign autographs during the opening morning.

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/business/20161021/jc-penney-returns-to-san-bernardino-after-13-year-absence>

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Project should ease traffic

Sunday Posted Oct 23, 2016 at 12:01 AM
Updated Oct 23, 2016 at 5:12 PM

By **Rene Ray De La Cruz**
Staff Writer



HESPERIA — Commuters in this High Desert city should see an improvement in traffic flow after the implementation of Smart Corridor Signal Technology, which now synchronizes traffic signals along a portion of one busy roadway.

The city announced the completion of the Main Street Traffic Signal Synchronization Project along a 2.5-mile stretch of Main Street between I Avenue and Eleventh Avenue.

City staff said the nearly one-month project, which was completed Friday, uses Intelligent Transportation System technology that will result in improved signal timing and reduce traffic congestion along Main Street.

The project interconnects and synchronizes traffic signals using ITS technology that improves traffic mobility, effectively decreasing air pollution emissions produced by recurring acceleration and deceleration of motor vehicle traffic.

“Preserving our clean desert air is important,” Mayor Bill Holland said. “By improving traffic circulation through the corridor, this project will help to sustain our air quality while also alleviating traffic congestion.”

Benefits of the ITS includes reduction in the number of commuter stops, reduction in greenhouse gas emissions caused by motor vehicles, reduction in fuel consumption, reduction in travel time, reduction in traffic congestion,

improvement in signal timing, and enhancement of perpetual vehicular movement.

Funding for the Main Street Traffic Signal Synchronization Project was provided in part by a \$246,200 grant received from the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District's AB 2766 Competitive Grant Program, which utilizes a portion of funds allocated to the air district from motor vehicle registration fees to fund local projects that reduce mobile source emissions and improve air quality.

MDAQMD Executive Director Brad Poiriez said his agency is proud to partner with Hesperia on the emission-reduction project, which will enhance the agency's efforts to improve the High Desert's air quality, while decreasing traffic congestion within the region.

The city of Hesperia contributed the remaining funds using Measure I Renewal funds through San Bernardino Associated Governments.

The city of Victorville has used smart corridor signal technology since 1984 when the system was used on Seventh Street.

"In 1995, we used the technology available at that time to coordinate traffic signals on Bear Valley Road from Jacaranda to the Mall area," Victorville spokeswoman Sue Jones said. "We have updated our systems throughout the years to take advantage of new technologies as they have become available."

Seven corridors use the coordinated signal system, including La Mesa and Nisqualli roads from Amethyst Road to Hesperia Road, Air Express from Phantom West to Village Drive, and Bear Valley Road from Eagle Ranch Parkway to Fish Hatchery Road.

"Our implementation of fiber in past six years has allowed us to employ smart corridor technology," Jones said. "We are installing fiber at the intersection of Bear Valley Road and Amargosa as part of our construction project on Bear Valley Road."

Apple Valley spokeswoman Kathie Martin said the town currently does not utilize ITS technology, but is preparing to go out for proposals to pursue this.

The only stretch of road in Apple Valley that would benefit from ITS would be Bear Valley Road from the Mojave River to the signal at Lowe's on Apple Valley Road, Martin said.

Rene Ray De La Cruz may be reached at 760-951-6227, RDeLaCruz@VVDailyPress.com or on Twitter @DP_ReneDeLaCruz.

Rain moves into Southern California with a bigger storm forecast for later in the week



Rain falls in downtown Los Angeles on Oct. 23 (Laura J. Nelson / Los Angeles Times)

By **Shelby Grad**

OCTOBER 24, 2016, 5:30 AM

Southern California was hit by scattered showers — with some areas experiencing thunder, lightning and spells of heavier rain — as a storm moved through the region late Sunday and early Monday .

The [National Weather Service](#) said showers will continue on and off through Monday before giving way to clear skies by Tuesday. A stronger storm was expected to move into the area Thursday and Friday, forecasters said.

VIDEO: BRACKET HACK: (4) CALIFORNIA



In a region that has seen so little rain in recent years, the storm was welcome, but the weather service said most areas saw considerably less than an inch of precipitation.

In July, experts at the [weather service](#) confirmed that the last five years have been the driest ever documented in downtown L.A. since official record-keeping began almost 140 years ago.

Forecasters said the storm expected later this week would likely be more powerful than the one that began Sunday.

“After fair weather on Tuesday and Wednesday, there is potential for a much stronger storm system on Thursday and Friday. This system could bring significant rainfall totals and thunderstorms,” the weather service wrote in an alert. “Any thunderstorms on recent burn areas could result in the first mud and debris flows of the season. Flash flooding and ponding of water on roadways will also be possible, along with traffic and airport delays, and localized wind damage.”

ALSO

[L.A. County sheriff's sergeant dies after crash in Compton](#)

[Obama is due back in L.A. Here's where to watch out for traffic](#)

[Riverside County coroner's officials work to identify victims of fatal bus crash](#)

13 dead, 31 others injured in tour bus crash near Palm Springs. 'Everyone, dead and alive, was covered with blood'



"In almost 35 years, I've never been to a crash where there's been 13 confirmed fatalities," said [California Highway Patrol](#) Border Division Chief Jim Abele. "It's tough ... you never get used to this." (Gina Ferazzi / Los Angeles Times)

By **Paloma Esquivel, Anh Do and Laura J. Nelson**

OCTOBER 23, 2016, 6:30 PM | REPORTING FROM DESERT HOT SPRINGS, CALIF.

They had spent the night at a casino near the Salton Sea, so many of the passengers had fallen asleep as the USA Holiday tour bus rumbled west on the 10 Freeway on the way home to Los Angeles.

Before dawn, they were jolted awake by screams and a grinding cacophony of metal on metal.

VIDEO: CALIFORNIA BUS CRASH KILLS 13



Thirteen people were killed and 31 others injured Sunday morning when the bus crashed into a big rig truck near Palm Springs, officials said.

Federal and local investigators are probing the cause of the crash, the deadliest in California in several decades.

The bus slammed into the back of the truck's trailer, crushing the front third of the cabin. Most of those who died appeared to have been sitting toward the front of the bus.

"I was awakened by the sounds of people screaming for help," said passenger Ana Car, 61. "I noticed a heavysset woman lying in the center aisle to my right yelling, 'My legs! My legs!'"

The crash occurred at 5:17 a.m. Sunday in Desert Hot Springs as the bus headed back to Los Angeles from a casino in Thermal near the Salton Sea.

CHP officers in marked patrol cars had been periodically slowing and stopping traffic along that stretch of the 10 Freeway overnight for a Southern California Edison crew that was working on electrical wires that crossed over the roadway.

Traffic had begun to move again before the collision, Sgt. Daniel Hesser said, but speeds were much slower than the typical freeway flow.

The front of the white tour bus was crumpled and largely destroyed, suggesting the bus was traveling much faster than the truck, officials said. They cautioned that it was too early to say whether the bus driver, who died

in the crash, was speeding.

Police and rescuers came across a horrific scene of destruction.

“In almost 35 years, I've never been to a crash where there's been 13 confirmed fatalities,” said California Highway Patrol Border Division Chief Jim Abele. “It's tough ... you never get used to this.”

By noon, the remains of the bus had been towed away. Carpeted seats and passengers' purses and backpacks had been cleared from the road.

Bodies that had lined the side of the road in white bags were removed, two at a time, in a slow procession of coroner's vans.

Officials said the bus did not have seat belts. As a result, some of the victims suffered facial injuries involving soft tissue and bones and may require plastic surgery, said Dr. Ricard Townsend at Desert Regional Medical Center.

Investigators will look at whether the driver fell asleep, had a heart attack or was under the influence of alcohol or drugs, Abele said. They will also investigate the possibility of a mechanical failure.

Authorities hope to recover a data recorder that would reveal how fast the bus was traveling and whether the driver braked before impact. The bus, manufactured in 1996, may not have one on board, officials said.

“Essentially, we just don't have all the pieces to the puzzle,” Abele said. “We may not be able to determine exactly why the accident occurred because the driver has been killed.”

Passengers said they boarded the USA Holiday bus Saturday night at the intersection of Olympic Boulevard and Vermont Avenue for a trip to the Red Earth Casino in Thermal.

In the past, the bus company had used Facebook and Instagram to advertise such trips, saying a \$20 ticket covered round-trip travel and 4½ hours of gambling.

The company has advertised similar trips from the San Fernando Valley and Southeast Los Angeles to Las Vegas and casinos across Southern California.

Identifying the victims and some survivors could take days, Abele said, because some were not carrying identification cards or were separated from their belongings when they were taken to the hospital.

The family of Rosalba Ruiz emerged from the Riverside County coroner's office in tears. The 53-year-old mother of three and grandmother of five from Los Angeles was killed in the crash, said Claudio Fernandez, who said Ruiz was married to his uncle.

Ruiz enjoyed going to casinos and did so often, sometimes weekly, Fernandez said.

"She used to love to go to the casinos, that was part of her hobby," he said.

"You don't believe that will happen," he added. "We went to three hospitals and couldn't find her and we couldn't get answers."

Then, they were told to go to the coroner's office.

Other families also made the grim journey to Perris.

Lester Pelaez of Lancaster and his family arrived in search of news about his brother-in-law's mother, who he believes was on the tour bus.

The family has been calling and visiting hospitals but have not been able to find her, he said. But a passenger at one hospital had told a family member that someone matching her description was on the bus.

Officials received calls Sunday from Mexican, Australian and Japanese consulates. The majority of the victims were Latino, Abele said. "We're assuming many of them are from Los Angeles because that's where the bus originated," he said.

Ten of the victims were women and three were men, the Riverside County coroner's office said.

Staff at the Desert Regional Medical Center in Palm Springs brought in nurses and technicians to translate for injured patients who spoke only Spanish.

The hospital, the Coachella Valley's only trauma center, received 14 adult patients, including five who were in critical condition, said public information officer Richard Ramhoff.

Two other hospitals received 16 adult patients with minor injuries, including neck pain, cuts and abrasions, employees there said.

Employees from the [National Transportation Safety Board](#) will arrive in Southern California on Monday to assist with the investigation, officials said.

USA Holiday is an Alhambra-based company that owns one bus and employs one driver, according to federal records.

The company was last inspected by federal transportation officials in April of last year and received a satisfactory rating, according to FreightConnect, a private data provider. No issues with the coach or driver were reported.

The company drove 68,780 miles in 2015, the most recent data available, federal records indicate.

Officials have not identified the bus driver, but his neighbors in Alhambra said his name was Elias Vides.

For years, Vides drove buses filled with older passengers to casinos across the Southland, said Sonia Anderson, Vides' next-door neighbor. At night, he parked the tour bus on the street near his apartment.

"I hope he survived," Anderson said, examining a photo of the wreck. "I feel for his family."

Sunday's crash is among the deadliest in California history.

In Chualar in 1963, [32 Mexican farm workers](#) who were in the Central Valley as part of a work visa program were killed when a freight train struck the flatbed truck they were riding on.

In 1976, a bus carrying the Yuba City high school choir plunged off a freeway ramp in Martinez and crashed more than 30 feet below, [killing 28 students and one teacher](#).

And in Northern California in 2014, [10 people were killed](#) when a FedEx truck veered across Interstate 5 near Orland and crashed into a bus carrying high school students from Los Angeles.

After that crash, Gov. Jerry Brown signed a law that requires buses manufactured after 2020 that carry more than 39 people to be equipped with emergency lighting that would automatically illuminate after a collision, to aid with evacuation.

The law also requires bus drivers to provide instructions to all passengers on how to use safety equipment and emergency exits before departing.

A separate bill signed into law was drafted following a tour [bus crash](#) in San Francisco's Union Square that injured 19 people. The law requires the CHP to develop protocols for working with cities and counties to increase the number of tour bus inspections within their jurisdictions.

Times Staff Writers Richard Winton, Doug Smith and Matt Hamilton contributed to this report.

ALSO

[LAPD investigating fatal shooting at downtown apartment complex](#)

[Woman's body found near Santa Barbara-area shooting range](#)

[Garden Grove boy, 7, who was found with deceased father dies at hospital](#)

[Masked gunman kills employee at El Monte Jack in the Box](#)

UPDATES:

6:30 p.m. This article was updated with comments from a family member of one of the crash victims.

San Bernardino County Sun (<http://www.sbsun.com>)

How firefighting tactics have changed since deadly Esperanza fire

Cal Fire and the U.S. Forest Service make changes for protecting lives and homes during wildfires

By Brian Rokos, *The Press-Enterprise*

Sunday, October 23, 2016



In the 10 years since an explosive [Esperanza fire](#) killed five U.S. Forest Service firefighters protecting an unoccupied home in the San Jacinto Mountains, wildland firefighting tactics, philosophies and organizational culture have changed, with agencies now strongly emphasizing valuing emergency workers' lives over buildings.

Some of the new guidelines, officials say, are inevitable improvements in firefighting, the timing of which are coincidental. Others can be directly attributed to efforts to prevent a repeat of the doomed stand that the Engine 57 crew of Capt. Mark Loutzenhiser, Jess McLean, Jason McKay, Daniel Najera and Pablo Cerda made at the so-called

Octagon House in Twin Pines overlooking the San Geronio Pass.

• 10 years later: [How the Esperanza fire became a raging inferno that killed 5 firefighters](#)

“For many of us who were there, there is the awareness that you never want to go through this again,” said John Hawkins, chief of Cal Fire’s Riverside Unit, which assumed initial command of the Oct. 26, 2006, fire before being joined by the Forest Service. “The job of firefighting is continually evolving, whether we have fatality fires or not. Fatality fires truly do drive the law of catastrophic reform.”

Shawna Legarza, who in June became the Forest Service’s director of Fire and Aviation, said she inherited an agency that is in transition.

“The biggest shift that we’ve made from Esperanza and Engine 57 is really trying to become a learning organization,” said Legarza, who was chief of the San Bernardino National Forest from 2011 to 2013.

It’s not that the Forest Service is just now emphasizing safety. The 10 safety-related Standard Firefighting Orders were developed in 1957; shortly thereafter, 18 Watch Out Situations also were created to avoid tragedy.

But John Phipps, director of the Forest Service’s Rocky Mountain Research Station, said those 28 rules did not consider the complexities of fighting wildland fires that can increase in ferocity at a moment’s notice because of wind, topography and temperature, and as a result, firefighters for a time were too strictly held accountable for violating them.

Mistakes called criminal

In 2001, when four hand crew members were killed battling the Thirtymile fire in Washington state, victims’ families and politicians clamored for answers and accountability. That resulted in Congress passing a law requiring that the Office of Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the parent agency of the Forest Service, investigate every wildland fire that resulted in a federal firefighter death.

Ellreese Daniels, a Thirtymile fire incident commander, was charged with four counts of manslaughter among 11 felony charges. Eventually he pleaded guilty to two counts of making false statements to investigators about his crew's positioning and was sentenced to 90 days in a work-release program.

The prosecutions had a secondary effect: Federal firefighters, fearing jail, began refusing to cooperate with investigators, limiting what officials could glean from mistakes to make sure they didn't happen again, Phipps said. Firefighters also began purchasing liability insurance and refusing supervisory assignments, according to reports.

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The Inspector General's 2009 report on the Esperanza fire said some firefighters refused to cooperate with investigators, fearing criminal prosecution. To allow the joint Cal Fire/Forest Service investigation to go forward, Inspector General investigators delayed their interviews until January 2008.

Eventually, Phipps said, Forest Service officials began to realize that firefighters were still dying despite the heavy-handed approach. The Forest Service in 2014 adopted new investigation methods that focus on learning from mistakes instead of finding fault.

"Instead of holding individuals responsible, we're trying to hold the organization responsible for learning how to change this system so it can increase the probability that everybody goes home," Phipps said.

No fire commanders were prosecuted in the Esperanza fire.

Communications confusion?

The 2013 book "The Esperanza Fire: Arson, Murder and the Agony of Engine 57," by John N. Maclean, suggests that the Forest Service's Loutzenhiser misunderstood what Cal Fire Battalion Chief Bob Toups said was his warning to leave the Octagon House for safety reasons, or that Toups did not clearly convey the gravity of his concern before the flames roared up a funnel-shaped creek drainage and swept over the crew in seconds with temperatures of at least 1,600 degrees.

The 118-page Esperanza Fire Accident Investigation Factual Report, released in July 2007 and jointly written by Cal Fire and the Forest Service, did not attempt to sort that out. Investigators instead wrote that they found "a loss of situational awareness concerning the dangers associated with potential fire behavior and fire environment while in a complex wildland urban interface situation," a term for where homes abut forests. They also wrote that the decision to attempt to save the Octagon House at the head of a rapidly developing fire either underestimated or accepted the safety risk.

• **Pablo Cerda:** ['I miss him every day,' says sister of fallen Esperanza firefighter](#)

The captains of four other engines protecting homes nearby rejected those assertions in a September 2007 response. Others in the fire service, including Toups, have described the title of the Factual Report as a misnomer.

The Inspector General report, meanwhile, provided a detailed account by Toups. Toups said Loutzenhiser told him he planned to leave the Octagon House when the flames approached, and that he told Loutzenhiser "that this was not a place they wanted to be and that they could not fight the fire there."

Engine 57 was to leave the Octagon House and meet up with crews in a safer area several hundred yards away when the fire was close to the bottom of the drainage area, Toups told investigators.

Hawkins, who said he believes Toups' account, added sadly that the other witnesses to what happened are dead.

Toups retired seven years ago as an assistant chief and lives in Canyon Lake. He declined in a recent interview to talk about his conversation with Loutzenhiser. But he did say: "It's a terrible tragedy. People like myself are still scarred by it."

• **Mark Loutzenhiser:** [‘God and the community’ saved wife of fallen Esperanza firefighter](#)

Toups now consults for a company that has developed a web-based product that can track the exact location of firefighters and fire engines and allow fire commanders to see from afar when they are in danger. Hawkins and Legarza said firefighting agencies in general are behind in adopting technology.

"I think it would significantly reduce the possibility of a terrible accident like this," Toups said.

Tim Chavez was a Cal Fire captain when the Esperanza fire broke out about 1 a.m. He watched as a combination of heat, dry brush and Santa Ana winds caused flames to suddenly explode uphill toward the Engine 57 crew. Chavez said some of the ideas for the operating principles "definitely came out of Esperanza."

Now a battalion chief and fire behavior analyst, Chavez said Cal Fire is getting away from putting firefighters in the path of flames.

"Oftentimes, in the first place, you are not successful, and in the second place, that's how you kill people," Chavez said.

Structure protection secondary

The Factual Report also expressed concern over a joint Cal Fire/Forest Service firefighting plan that investigators said appeared to have emphasized aggressive structure protection over firefighter safety.

Some issues raised by the report were addressed when, in 2014, Cal Fire released the 313-page Wildland Urban Interface Operating Principles to provide better training in safety, protecting structures, leadership, fire behavior and other subjects.

"Because firefighter and civilian safety is always the first consideration, any tactical action should reflect that concern," the document says.

Hawkins said he hopes all — local, state and federal — firefighting agencies in California will adopt the standards in the 2014 document.

• **Jason McKay:** [Double the grief this year for family firefighter killed during Esperanza fire](#)

The Forest Service has, in the past year, had conversations with its firefighters that emphasized their safety, Legarza said.

"We want to make sure all of our employees, when they have time to think things through, they think things through more than they have in the past. Talking about life and property and what is the most important value: human life," Legarza said.

The Forest Service has made other changes, such as ranking areas by risk to firefighters and the public, with dispatchers relaying that information to fire crews. Over 2011-12, Legarza said, the Forest Service turned over primary responsibility for structure protection during wildfires in Big Bear, Lake Arrowhead and Idyllwild to Cal Fire.

"It seemed like that was putting our firefighters in a place of more risk and a conflict of what the mission of this agency is: land management and exterior (structure) protection," Legarza said.

• **Daniel Hoover-Najera:** [Name of youngest firefighter killed during Esperanza fire lives on](#)

Cal Fire spokeswoman Janet Upton said a “vast majority” of the homes in those areas are in locations where state and local firefighters have responsibility for structure protection.

“We are trained to do that. It’s a risk we accept,” Upton said.

The Forest Service also has completed implementing seven recommendations made by a Forest Service task force in the wake of Esperanza, including integrating its firefighting plans with those adopted by Riverside County fire safety task forces and improving risk assessment.

“Reducing risk ... it will never end,” Legarza said. “We manage our risk so we can come home every single day on every single fire.”

Safer firefighting

A U.S. Forest Service accident review board convened after the Esperanza fire in 2006 produced this plan, which USFS officials say has been implemented:

Distribute maps that identify high-risk fire areas.

In California, integrate U.S. Forest Service firefighting plans with those adopted by Riverside County fire safety task forces. Aggressively seek ways to improve firefighter safety.

Update investigation training to clarify reporting requirements, collateral investigations, union involvement, reporting writing and procedures for documenting near-miss incidents. Develop investigatory lessons learned from Esperanza.

Begin reviewing wildfire fighting principles and determine ways to assess risk when making decisions about fighting fires in the wildland urban interface, the area where homes and property abut with wildland.

Based on the previous recommendation, ask the National Wildland Fire Coordinating Group to review Forest Service operations in the wildland urban interface.

Use the fatalities and investigation as a training tool to emphasize the priority of preserving life over structure protection.

Include the creek drainage that funneled the Esperanza fire toward the USFS crew in a terrain-awareness poster.

Source: U.S. Forest Service

Safer homes

Riverside County in 2015 made what spokesman Ray Smith said were significant updates to the Fire Hazard section of the General Plan, which guides development in the county. Among the highlights:

Emphasize the potential for disastrous loss of structures and life.

Proposed development within Fire Hazard Severity Zones shall be reviewed by the Riverside County Fire and Building and Safety departments.

All proposed development and construction shall meet minimum standards for fire safety as defined in the Riverside County building or county fire codes, or by county zoning.

Continue to implement additional standards for high-risk, high-occupancy and essential facilities to make sure the buildings do not impede emergency exits for firefighters and equipment.

Encourage continued operation of programs for fuel breaks, brush management, controlled burning, revegetation and fire roads.

Source: Riverside County

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20161023/how-firefighting-tactics-have-changed-since-deadly-esperanza-fire>

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Double the grief this year for family of firefighter Jason McKay killed during Esperanza fire

By Jim Steinberg, The Sun

Sunday, October 23, 2016



The 10th anniversary of Jason McKay's death will be especially hard on his sisters.

Their mother, Bonnie McKay, died of cancer June 5.

It will also be the first year Jason's youngest sister, Crystal Quigley, 31, doesn't gather with the families of the other four firefighters killed alongside Jason when an inferno engulfed them while fighting the [Esperanza fire](#) on Oct. 26, 2006.

• **10 years later:** [How the Esperanza fire became a raging inferno that killed 5 firefighters](#)

After her mother's death, Crystal and husband Paul moved to North Dakota to be closer to her middle sister, Jody, 33. Both of them have two young daughters, and they wanted their girls to grow up together.

Since the tragedy, the families of other victims have banded together as one big family, offering support to each other, Crystal said recently in an online conversation.

"We are here for each other. They helped a lot when my mom was sick," Quigley said.

The passage of time hasn't dulled the loss.

"The pain is still as strong, as when I first found out," she wrote. "I just learn to live with it."

• **Jess McLean:** [For mother of fallen Esperanza firefighter, 'the grief is always there'](#)

This time of year also leaves Staci Hines shaken. A decade ago, she was Staci Burger, living in Hemet and engaged to the love of her life. They were talking about a wedding date, and Jason was having an engagement ring custom-made for her.

Staci — now married and living in northern Colorado — recalled that after Jason's sudden death, she "went through all the stages of grieving."

It started with denial. She would awaken thinking Jason was still alive.

"It was traumatic to say the least. I had a hard time getting out of bed for the first month," she recently by phone.

• **Daniel Hoover-Najera:** [Name of youngest firefighter killed during Esperanza fire lives on](#)

Staci said she was in the anger stage when the trial of arson suspect Raymond Lee Oyler began, and that time period exacerbated her great loss.

Both Staci and Crystal testified during the trial.

“I honestly don’t like to think about it. I try to focus on the good memories,” Crystal said. She prefers to think about how heroic her brother and the other firefighters were.

But she regards the trial — and the guilty verdict — as critical.

“It was important for me that this didn’t happen again to someone else,” she said.

Jason was born in Minnesota, but the family moved to the High Desert of Southern California when he was 18 months old.

• **Pablo Cerda:** [‘I miss him every day,’ says sister of fallen Esperanza firefighter](#)

Their father left when Jason was 13, Crystal said. That pushed her brother to grow up quickly and be the “man of the household,” she said.

His mother, in an interview a year after Jason’s death, remembered that year’s Christmas. Jason earned \$500 for cleaning a construction site, and paid the month’s rent so his mother would have money for presents.

Jason started in a Fire Explorer Scout program when he was 14, and graduated from Victorville’s Goodwill High School early, Crystal said.

He attended the Fire Academy at Victor Valley College, where he earned an associate degree in fire technology, she said.

Staci and Jason met when she was 23. She worked part-time for the Forest Service as a recreation technician and Jason was a firefighter at the Forest Service’s Alandale station in Idyllwild.

• **Mark Loutzenhiser:** [‘God and the community’ saved wife of fallen Esperanza firefighter](#)

After his death, Staci also attended a fire academy. She said at the time, she wanted to become an arson investigator so she could “take out (of circulation) whoever is doing this kind of stuff.”

She met her future husband, Jarrod Hines, while working as a seasonal firefighter in San Diego, where he was stationed as well.

After a few years, however, Staci said she realized she “didn’t love being a firefighter ... It wasn’t my dream, it was Jason’s.”

She found work as a Riverside County probation officer, a field she loves.

“It’s very rewarding for me to see people get their lives back together,” she said.

Staci married Jarrod in late 2009, and about two years ago, work took the couple to Colorado.

“I will always be grateful to God for bringing Jason into my life. I am a better person today because of him,” Staci said.

URL: <http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20161023/double-the-grief-this-year-for-family-of-firefighter-jason-mckay-killed-during-esperanza-fire>

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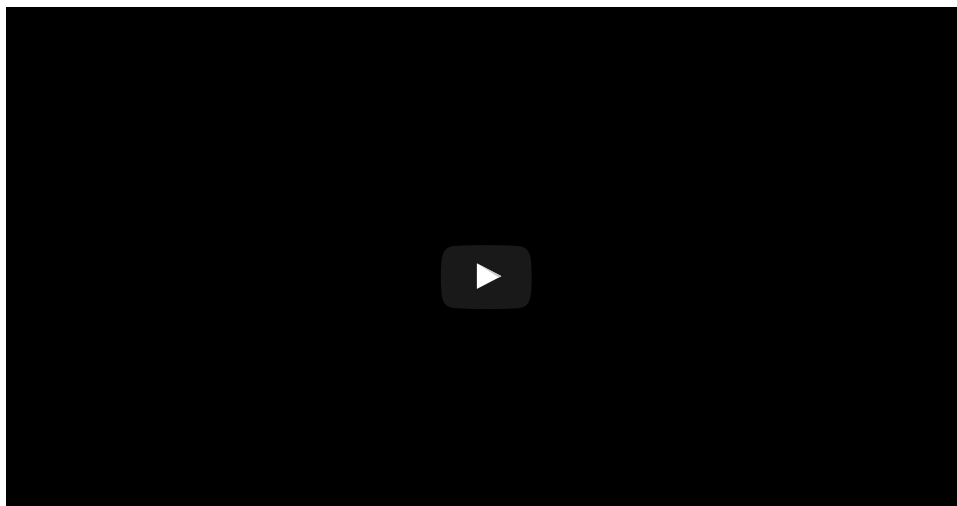


California's Housing Crisis Puts Squeeze on Employers and Their Workforce

POSTED BY : CA ECONOMIC SUMMIT OCTOBER 21, 2016

By John Guenther.

As California's housing crisis is increasingly vexing more Californians across the income spectrum, more organizations are calling it a threat to the state's economic competitiveness and vitality. In the video below, leaders from business groups representing employers in the Bay Area and Silicon Valley talk about the impact of rising housing costs.



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With one in four Californians struggling economically, rental rates keep rising and incomes overall are falling. This is putting a strain on California's workforce, especially on low-income residents, but also those in the middle-income range.



Eric R. Gavin
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That pushes workers farther away, who must drive long distances from their homes to get to their jobs, especially when their jobs are in places like Santa Barbara, adding to traffic for everybody on the road.

Some employers in expensive Bay Area cities are so concerned about housing they're looking into workforce housing solutions for a whole range of income brackets.

A San Mateo County school district is exploring the development of workforce housing for teachers and staff pressured by the cost of living. And an agricultural company in Monterey County built their own workforce housing after experiencing for the first time not having enough seasonal workers available due to housing costs.

The problem is familiar for employers and workers in Southern California as well, as the cost of a median home in a six-county region there has gone over \$500,000. This week, a planning group covering those six counties, the Southern California Association of Governments, gathered hundreds of local officials, planning experts, and homebuilders to talk about how to increase the housing supply through fiscal incentives, identifying funding resources, and local planning policies.

The conference also dove into the cost of "not housing" and the effects of the state's undersupply on affordability, health, and traffic.



Marnie Primmer
@TranspoMarnie

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There is a cost to not housing. The cost is borne by all of us. Hate traffic? Fix housing. Amen! #Preach @RaphaelBostic

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Originally posted at the California Economic Summit.

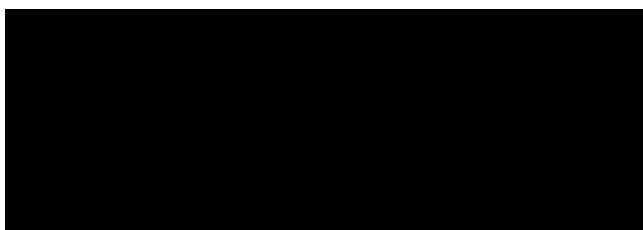
The California Economic Summit has made housing a signature issue, elevating the problem to be part of the One Million Challenges, an ambitious set of goals to boost upward mobility and shared prosperity for all Californians.

At the 2016 California Economic Summit on December 13-14, participants will gather to hone strategies that take an all-of-the-above approach, inviting ideas to advance the Summit's goal of building one million homes over the next decade.

You're invited to join them and share your ideas for tackling the housing crisis, closing the skills gap, and more.

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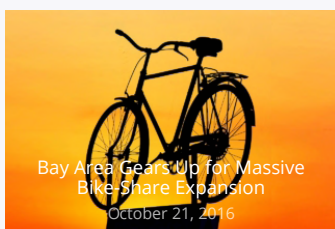
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How can Inland Empire kids protect us from hackers in the future?

By Neil Nisperos, Inland Valley Daily Bulletin

Saturday, October 22, 2016



SAN BERNARDINO >> The year is 2030 and state-sponsored hackers have taken control of the Internet, our driverless cars and humanoid robot assistants.

With the massive cyber attack that caused an [Internet outage](#) for most of the U.S. Friday, and the release of [private e-mails by likely state-sponsored hackers](#) in an effort to impact the 2016 presidential election, this scary future scenario isn't outside the realm of possibility. So in the future, who's going to protect us from the bad guys?

It might just be the children learning the tools of the computer programming trade in [Kids That Code](#), a San Bernardino-based after school enrichment program, which held a workshop for hundreds of students at Cal State San Bernardino Saturday.

“These kids are at that point now where we have three-year-old that can swipe a phone better than their parents,” said Patrick Person, a CSUSB business graduate and CEO of Kids That Code. “This is their generation, so now we're actually trying to catch up to them by giving them the tools necessary. They might be the ones that stop that next hack, who knows.”

On Saturday, a group of fifth and sixth graders in the program were busy in a university computer lab typing in lines of computer code through a program called “Scratch” that allows students to engineer a video game.

“Today in this class we have 29 students and half of those students are on an Arrowhead United Way scholarship, which made it possible for kids from underrepresented areas to actually attend,” program director Alfonso Anaya said.

Joseph Panameno, 11, a 6th grader who attends Public Safety Academy in Rialto, sat behind a computer screen using Scratch to allow a spaceship to fire laser blasts, similar to the spaceships in “Space Invaders” and “Galaga.”

“You can create your own games on (Scratch),” said Panameno, who added he'd like to program video games in the future. “It's really hard and it's like math homework because you have to keep paying attention.”

Beside him sat Kira Gibson, 11, who attends Palm Avenue Elementary School in San Bernardino. She said she's also considering a future in video game design.

“It can be hard at times like if you're making the big video game all the world can see, it's really hard because you have to fix all the bugs and glitches,” Gibson said.

Anaya said the goal is to inspire kids from third to eighth grad to take an interest in technology-related subjects like computer programming, electronics and web design, because of the tremendous demand for skilled

employees in those industries today and in the future.

“It’s very important because statistics show that by 2020 there will be 1.4 million jobs in the computer science industry and only 400,000 qualified applicants that will fill those jobs, so we need to equip the next generation for those jobs that are coming out,” Anaya said.

Kids That Code was launched in March of 2015. Interested parents in the region can visit KidsThatCode.org to enroll their children in the program and find scholarships available from Arrowhead United Way.

“We know from just working with the kids, they’re ready now,” Person said. “It’s not like they have to wait until they’re in high school or college. Literally, in third or fourth grade, they’re doing stuff that will blow your mind actually.”

URL: <http://www.dailybulletin.com/social-affairs/20161022/how-can-inland-empire-kids-protect-us-from-hackers-in-the-future>

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Office markets in LA County, Inland Empire are gaining momentum

Local office markets are gaining momentum

By Kevin Smith, San Gabriel Valley Tribune

Saturday, October 22, 2016

Southern California's office markets are gaining strength, according to a pair of new reports from Marcus & Millichap.

Builders in the Los Angeles metro area will complete 2.5 million square feet of office space this year, one of the reports says. That's the highest yearly total since 2009.

Most of the new development is targeting the downtown Los Angeles market.

Last year 1.6 million square feet of office space was completed.

Office vacancy rates are also on the decline, and that's always good news. That means the properties are being snapped up by businesses that are expanding and have money to spend.

For those who don't remember, there wasn't a lot of that going on in the years immediately following the Great Recession. So this is what we want to hear.

The report says the metro vacancy rate for office space will decline 50 basis points to 14.8 percent this year as nearly 4 million square feet of office space is absorbed. That's a heck of a lot better than the previous four quarters when the vacancy rate rose 20 basis points as net absorption lagged behind the supply of available properties.

The lower vacancy rate has boosted the average asking rent by 5.5 percent to \$34.90 per square foot. That matches the prior year's growth.

Another 4 million-plus square feet of office space is in the planning pipeline and those projects are expected to be completed next year.

The largest one that's expected to be finished this year will be the Los Angeles Federal Courthouse at 107 S. Broadway in downtown L.A. The 600,000-square-foot building is entirely leased and three additional properties that are under construction will add another 200,000 square feet of space.

Declining vacancy rates have spurred developers to expand their project pipeline. The report notes that most of the activity is concentrated in the region's strongest submarkets, including the mid-Wilshire area in downtown L.A. and a cluster of submarkets that make up the Westside cities and the South Bay where technology tenants have emerged as the primary demand driver for new space.

Builders in Riverside-San Bernardino metro area are also ramping up.

After completing more than 221,000 square feet of office space in 2015, they're on track to deliver nearly 509,000 square feet of office space this year, according to the other Marcus & Millichap report. East San Bernardino and south Riverside will see most of the activity.

The two-county region isn't faring as well with vacancy rates, however. Last year, 966,000 square feet of available office space was absorbed, which pushed the vacancy rate down 140 basis points to 14.4 percent. But this year vacancies will tick up 60 basis points as deliveries outpace net absorption, ending the year with a vacancy rate of 15 percent.

Office rents are rising in the Inland Empire as well. During the year ending in June, the average asking rent rose 2.6 percent to \$20.24 per square foot.

The highest rent during the last four quarters could be found in the Corona area — around \$24 per square foot. The more affordable rents were in the northern and eastern submarkets of San Bernardino, ranging between \$17 and \$18 per square foot.

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Lawmakers condemn Pentagon push to make California veterans pay back enlistment bonuses



Short of troops to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan a decade ago, the California National Guard enticed thousands of soldiers with bonuses. Now the Pentagon is demanding the money back.

By **David S. Cloud**

OCTOBER 23, 2016, 4:55 PM | REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON

Lawmakers on Sunday condemned a [Pentagon effort to recoup enlistment bonuses](#) improperly paid to thousands of California National Guard soldiers a decade ago, saying the overpayments were not the soldiers' fault and calling on the Pentagon or [Congress](#) to waive their debts.

House Majority Leader [Kevin McCarthy](#) pledged a House investigation of the problem, calling the Pentagon demands for repayment of bonuses from combat veterans "disgraceful."

McCarthy (R-Bakersfield) said the House would demand a briefing from the National Guard Bureau, the Pentagon agency that oversees the California branch of the Guard.

[The Times reported](#) that the Pentagon was demanding repayment of enlistment bonuses — which often reached \$15,000 or more — from about 9,700 California Guard soldiers, many of whom served multiple combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"The Department of Defense should waive these repayments, and I will be requesting a full brief from Army and National Guard leadership," McCarthy said in a statement. "The House will investigate these reports to ensure our soldiers are fully honored for their service.

"Our military heroes should not shoulder the burden of military recruiters' faults from over a decade ago," McCarthy said. "They should not owe for what was promised during a difficult time in our country."

The bonuses were mostly given out from 2006 to 2008 by California Guard recruiters who were under pressure to help the Pentagon fill its ranks for two major wars.

Several California Guard officials pleaded guilty in 2010 to making fraudulent bonus payments.

The soldiers say the Pentagon is reneging on 10-year-old contracts and imposing severe hardship on veterans whose only mistake was taking money that was offered to them at the time.

"These service members — many of whom were sent into combat — are now being forced to make difficult and painful decisions to pay back thousands of dollars they never knew they owed," said Rep. [Mark Takano](#) (D-Riverside), a member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee. "The solution to this ridiculous situation is an act of Congress."

"I am appalled by the California National Guard's effort to claw back bonuses and benefits improperly paid to service members 10 years ago," Takano added.

The California Guard launched the repayment effort after audits of 14,000 soldiers who received bonuses determined that 9,700 did not qualify for all or some of the payments, or that the paperwork was missing.

Audits of soldier records began five years ago and were completed last month. Although the problem surfaced in other states, it was worst in California, which has 17,000 troops and is one of the largest state Guard organizations.

California Guard officials in Sacramento say federal law bars them from wiping out the debts, insisting that only the Pentagon can do so and that it may require an act of Congress.

"We didn't have authority to waive any debts," Col. Peter Cross, a spokesman for the California Guard, said Sunday.

California Guard officials emphasized that the Guard is helping troops file appeals. But the vast majority of soldiers who the Guard claims received the improper bonuses are still facing collection efforts.

Only 1,200 soldiers have sent the Pentagon appeals asking for forgiveness of some or all of their bonuses and other payments. About half of those have received reduction in their payments, officials said.

That leaves the rest facing large bills — and the threat of wage garnishment, tax liens and interest payments — if they refuse to pay, officials said.

"There are soldiers out there who are being pursued that have totally ignored us," Cross said. "If they want, they can contact us to start advocating on their behalf."

About 75% of the soldiers found to owe bonuses and other payments have either not replied to letters advising them of their debts or refused to cooperate, said Col. Michael Piazzoni, the California Guard officer who oversaw the audits.

Soldiers who filed a class-action lawsuit seeking to block the bonus recoupment said Sunday that they have seen a sharp increase in visitors to California Veterans for Justice, a Facebook page seeking contributions to help defray the costs of the lawsuit.

Justice Department lawyers have filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit, which is filed in federal district court in Sacramento, and a ruling by the judge in the case is expected by the end of the year

Robert Richmond, a former Army special forces soldier who is facing recoupment demands of \$19,000, said the soldiers had managed to raise only \$2,500 so far to pay lawyers' costs connected with the suit.

A petition started Saturday on the White House website after the Times story was posted online called for Congress to step in and alleviate the debts.

"To Congress: This is not the soldiers' fault nor should it be their burden," the petition reads. Please help these heroes."

To get a response from the White House, the petition needs 100,000 signatures by Nov. 21. As of Sunday, it had 64 signatures.

david.cloud@latimes.com

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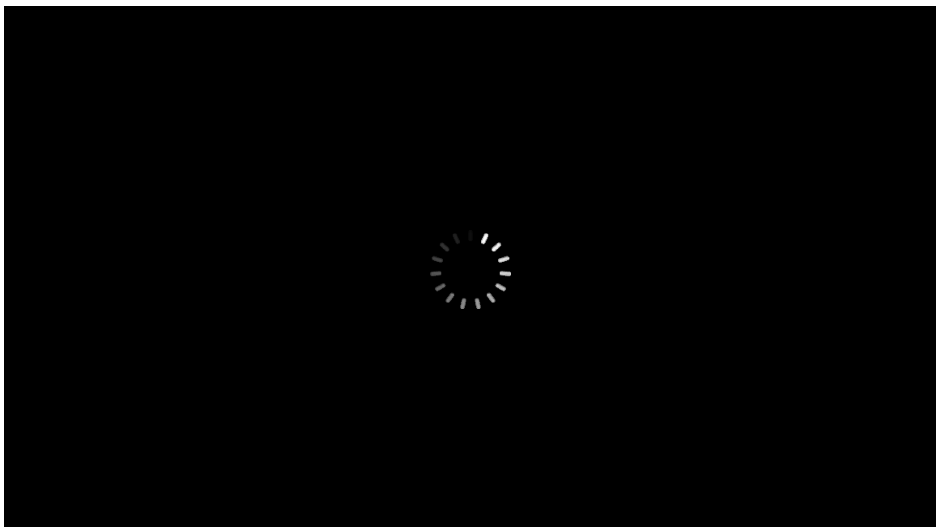
Thousands of California soldiers forced to repay enlistment bonuses a decade after going to war

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Video: Bracket Hack: (4) California



LAPD officer fatally shoots two people in riot, officers return to work?



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