

NEWS

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County accomplishes much for the public during 2006

The County of San Bernardino registered an exciting series of major accomplishments in 2006, focusing mostly on the areas of public safety, economic development, and customer service.

In addition to adding 37 deputy sheriff positions for county patrol stations, setting aside funding for a new state-of-the-art crime lab, and creating a Criminal Illegal Alien Identification Processing Unit at West Valley Detention Center to identify criminal illegal aliens in the county's corrections system, the County accomplished the following:

Adelanto Jail

The County of San Bernardino continued to grow at an amazing rate, and that growth creates challenges for everyone providing services to the public. On the negative side, the County's jail population is on the rise to the point where at the beginning of 2006 the Sheriff had to release approximately 800 inmates each month simply because of a lack of space.

The County helped address this problem with great efficiency in 2006 by quickly purchasing and renovating a privately-owned 700-bed prison in the city of Adelanto. Building a new prison would have taken several years, during which time thousands of inmates would have been released. The acquisition of the Adelanto facility immediately stemmed the tide and made the streets of San Bernardino County safer.

In August 2006, the Board of Supervisors took additional action that will eventually remove an additional 900 dangerous criminals from the streets by approving within the 2006-07 budget \$4.6 million in design funds to expand the Adelanto facility.

Coroner's Office

The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors took action to help the Coroner's Office meet the demands of the county's growing population by approving an additional \$2.8 million to expand and improve the county morgue while adding 14 new employees to the coroner operation to reduce caseloads, accommodate increased autopsies, and enhance other services.

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"The people of San Bernardino County deserve the peace of mind that comes from knowing that they and their loved ones will be treated properly if or when they are ever in the care of the Coroner's Office," Board of Supervisors Chairman Bill Postmus said when the funding was approved.

The \$2.8 million morgue expansion project will expand the morgue's refrigeration and freezing units and add shelving, replace the morgue's air conditioning system and add an emergency generator, replace three existing autopsy stations with five state-of-the-art stations, establish a forensic anthropology area, provide a dedicated tissue harvesting room, and add office space for medical examiners and autopsy assistants, among other improvements.

Addressing San Bernardino Crime Wave

In 2006 the County of San Bernardino continued to lend support to the City of San Bernardino's fight against a sharp increase in violent crimes by assigning Sheriff's deputies to assist city police officers.

In September 2006 the Board of Supervisors voted to direct \$285,723 in contingency funding toward continuing the participation of 10 Sheriff's deputies and 2 Sheriff's sergeants in a saturation patrol strategy in key areas of the city and adjacent unincorporated areas through the end of the year. The County's assistance began on November 22, 2005.

San Bernardino Mayor Pat Morris appeared before the Board of Supervisors to thank the supervisors for their support.

"You've stepped forward as responsible partners with the city to assist us," Mayor Morris told the Board of Supervisors. "We are taking every resource available to us to attack this issue of gang-induced violence in our city, and your help has been a critical bridge to that end."

The County also loaned the city the services of County Children's Network officer Kent Paxton to administrate the city's Operation Phoenix anti-crime community effort, and teamed County health and human services departments with similar agencies in the city.

Aid to Wildfire Victims

In July 2006, vast stretches of San Bernardino County's east desert were scorched by the Sawtooth and Millard Complex Fires. County government jumped into action by quickly creating a one-stop assistance center for fire victims where they could receive services from a variety of County, state, and private-sector agencies.

Later, the County went to great lengths to warn residents about the flood danger that frequently follows a major fire.

The County also established a toll-free phone line for residents to call for assistance, and the Board of Supervisors voted to waive fees for waste disposal and rebuilding.

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Hurricane Relief

During 2006 the County was honored twice for its extraordinary efforts in 2005 to assist the victims of Hurricane Katrina, particularly the people of Gulfport, Miss., a community the County officially adopted following the devastating storm.

First, the County received the highest honor available from the Inland Empire Chapter of the American Red Cross – the Humanitarian Award. Later in 2006, the County received a national Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties recognizing the effort to help Gulfport.

In 2005, the County rounded up several truckloads of surplus goods and supplies and approximately \$40,000 in gift cards donated by County employees and delivered them to Gulfport. The trip to Gulfport gave San Bernardino County emergency responders an opportunity to witness first-hand the aftermath of a major disaster and the subsequent relief efforts. Information acquired during the trip resulted in significant updates to the County's community disaster plan, placing an emphasis on self-sufficiency in the hours and days following a major catastrophe.

Disaster guide

In June 2006 the County Fire, Public Health, and Sheriff's departments joined forces to prepare and release a family disaster guide to instruct residents on how to prepare themselves for a major disaster.

The guide, inspired in part by lessons learned during recent county disasters and by what County leaders learned during a 2005 trip to Gulfport, Miss., following Hurricane Katrina, focused on the need to be self-sufficient for up to 72 hours until official help arrives.

The guide outlines how residents can make a plan, prepare their families, and practice the plan, as well as evacuation tips and where to go for information during an emergency.

More than 107,000 copies of the guide were distributed to residents in the unincorporated areas, the County's more than 18,000 employees, the County's 24 cities and towns, as well as the state's other 57 counties.

Golden Guardian

On November 13, 2006, the County of San Bernardino hosted the State of California's first-ever full-dress disaster drill. The Golden Guardian exercise at the County-owned Hyundai Pavilion at Glen Helen simulated a terrorist attack and provided training to hundreds of local emergency responders.

Mental Health Services

The County Department of Behavioral Health developed and won state approval for a multi-million-dollar plan to provide additional mental health services to County residents and expand current services.

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During the next three years the County will receive more than \$50 million in voter-approved state funding to assist a host of populations, including frequent users of inpatient services, and individuals exiting the Foster Care system, juvenile halls, and County jails. Under the County plan, services will be provided to approximately 6,500 new clients.

Increased Access to County Information

In February 2006 the Board of Supervisors took action to make several types of county government information more easily accessible to the public, including county campaign disclosure reports, statements of economic interest, facts about county contractors and vendors, and competitive proposal information available on the Internet.

The Board also took action to create an on-line searchable database of Board of Supervisors meeting agendas and Board actions, and to create a hosted e-mail subscription service to allow Internet users to receive free e-mail notifications of county website updates. The e-mail subscription service was launched in September.

"This action is a major step toward our goal to make San Bernardino County the most publicly accessible local government agency in the nation," Chairman Postmus said at the time.

NASCAR Sponsorships

The County is actively exploring ways to bring businesses to our region. Economic development was a significant focus for the County in 2006, and the biggest single effort on this front was the County's active sponsorship of activities related to the September 2006 NASCAR race weekend at the California Speedway near Fontana.

The County lent its name to the Opportunity, California FanZone, a revamped shopping, entertainment and dining complex directly outside the gates of the California Speedway. The County was also the title sponsor of the September 1 Relocate Here 200 NASCAR Grand National Division AutoZone West Series race.

The sponsorship role provided the County with a unique opportunity to promote the County as a destination to a national audience. In February 2007, San Bernardino County will increase its presence at the California Speedway by serving as the title sponsor to a nationally televised NASCAR Craftsman Truck Series race.

Access to Grant Information

The County in 2006 gave community groups, faith-based organizations, and County departments access to an on-line, web-based grant research database, allowing them to access federal, state and private funding opportunities.

The Board of Supervisors in June approved a contract with eCivis to provide countywide access to an extensive collection of grant resources. The contract expands access beyond County departments to community and faith-based organizations, free of charge, allowing users to compete for these dollars on a more equal footing.

"This tool gives organizations a broader net, allowing them to fish for additional funding opportunities," said San Bernardino County 5th District Supervisor Josie Gonzales. "As the grant market becomes increasingly competitive and traditional funding sources dwindle these groups need more resources like this that allow them to become more self-sufficient."

The on-line database was made available in more than 30 County libraries. The service is also available at County business resource centers in Rancho Cucamonga and Hesperia.

Healthy Communities

In April, the Board of Supervisors provided \$500,000 to the County Department of Public Health to create the infrastructure to support collaborative efforts that create healthier environments for County residents. The long-term objective is improved health of all residents as partners design communities for optimal health and through the promotion of healthful lifestyle choices.

County Regional Parks, Healthy Chino, the Healthy Communities initiative, and other community-based organizations sponsored an organized walk through Prado Regional Park in October. Healthy diet and becoming more physically active were focused on during the event.

Service FIRST

2006 saw the launching of a massive effort to train employees in good customer service methods and share with them information on the County's mission and philosophy.

As part of the Service FIRST program, County Administrative Officer Mark Uffer personally conducted dozens of two-hour seminars that each of the County's more than 18,000 employees is required to attend.

During the Service FIRST seminars, Mr. Uffer spoke with employees about the County's goals and recent accomplishments, and trained them in good customer service practices.

Dress Code

On February 7, 2006, the Board of Supervisors took a bold step toward improving customer service by adopting a unique and comprehensive dress code for County employees.

The County made positive headlines and garnered national attention for restricting tattoos, piercings, and denim, among other things. The County of San Bernardino's new dress code has been used as a guideline for many public sector agencies to follow, and the County's Human Resources Director was asked to speak on the subject at a recent Labor Relations Conference.

The policy was written to ensure County employees set forth a credible and professional image in the workplace and within the community. It was designed to be a guideline for departments, yet allows departmental discretion depending on the nature of work being performed or other specific event.

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Sammy Hagar Day

The Board of Supervisors declared May 23, 2006 as Sammy Hagar Day in San Bernardino County, honoring the Fontana native who has achieved rock superstardom as both a solo artist and as the lead singer of Van Halen.

Hagar and his family attended the May 23 Board meeting, at which Hagar spoke of spending time at Supervisor Josie Gonzales' restaurant and how his experiences growing up in San Bernardino County shaped many of the lyrics he has written over the years.

On June 3, 2006, Hagar honored his community by donating a portion of the proceeds from his concert at the County's Hyundai Pavilion at Glen Helen to the County's Arrowhead Regional Medical Center Burn Unit. Hagar and his family had toured the Burn Unit during his May 23 visit.