

Riverside County DISTRICT 1 NEWS

Fall 2010 Edition

Courtesy of **Bob Buster**, DISTRICT 1 Supervisor



Be Ready, Reduce Fire Threat



WITH SUMMER HAVING SCORCHED THE LANDSCAPE and the windy season on the way, it's time to be more vigilant when it comes to keeping your family and your home safe from fire.

Fire season is really a year-round problem for us in Southern California these days, but the danger is especially high on the windy days that are still ahead. I encourage you to do what you can to not only protect yourselves and your property, but also the lives and property of your neighbors.

The winter rains, combined with the rain that fell in April and even into May, drove vegetation growth for several months. Now, with summer behind us and Santa Ana winds on the way, all that

flora has turned into fuel--fuel that can drive a wildfire and endanger your family and your home.

Fortunately, we know what we need to do to minimize the risk as much as possible. Much of fire prevention and firefighting is directly tied to being prepared. Riverside County emphasizes that every day through its “**Ready, Set, Go**” campaign, which is designed to remind residents that the key to preventing a fire, and surviving when a fire breaks out, is to be prepared.

Be **READY** for the next round of fires by clearing brush at least 100 feet from around your property and your home. When a fire is raging, embers often are flying all over the place and the further you can get flammable material away from your home, the better. Keep tree limbs away from your property and remove leaves and pine needles from the gutters and other places this

flammable material can gather around your property.

Be **SET** by having everything you need at home to survive in case a fire breaks out and you are not evacuated, and by having your valuables at the ready in case you are evacuated and you literally have to run for your life. If there is a fire in your area, load what you may want to take in your vehicle as quickly as possible, and be ready to leave at a moment's notice.

GO when advised to do so by law enforcement. If they are telling you to leave the area, it is because you and your family are in imminent danger. They have your best interests and the best interests of your family in mind. Once you have done everything included in the “Ready, Set, Go” approach, there is very little you can do except possibly get in the way of professional firefighters

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UCR Medical School: Key to Riverside County's Future

ONE OF THE KEYS to Riverside County's future is the development of a new medical school at UC Riverside, and the county is helping ensure that the school can open in 2012.

The Board of Supervisors kept the project on track earlier this year by agreeing to provide \$10 million at a time when state funding was in doubt.

The UC Board of Regents approved establishment of the medical school about two years ago. The first incoming class of about four dozen students is expected to enroll in 2012, but much work—and much funding—remains.

The new medical school will have a transformative impact on Riverside County, much like the opening of UC Riverside itself decades ago. Just as UCR has helped improve the overall quality of life in the Inland Empire, so will the medical school change the face of healthcare in the region—



at a time when such change is sorely needed.

The Inland region has far fewer doctors per capita than other parts of Southern California and the U.S. Because of that relative lack of healthcare, Riverside County residents frequently have to travel outside the area for specialized medical care, which places a strain on patients and their families.

A medical school at UCR would help alleviate this problem by ensuring that the region is home to thousands of new medical

professionals during the coming decades. A medical school, and the offshoots of such a school in terms of clinics and teaching facilities, would dramatically increase access to healthcare in our area.

A new medical school also would have a very substantial economic impact. Just as UCR's growth has fostered economic activity in the surrounding Inland area, so too would a medical school serve as an economic catalyst.

It was heartening to see the state finally come up with the \$10 million as its share of the cost of starting the medical school at UCR. Until very recently, that funding was in doubt, which imperiled another

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Fire Season

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risking their lives to save your property.

This program, which was approved last December, is easy to remember. Ready, Set, Go explains it all. Now the important thing for you and your family is to follow through and be ready to respond if necessary. And, finally, be willing to heed the call to action, whether it comes from a first responder or from the county's "reverse 911" system, which allows key county agencies to alert residents by phone of an emergency in a specific area. Your landline at home is included automatically. You can register your mobile phone. ■



Supervisor Buster meets with some of his youngest constituents at the "graduation" ceremony for participants in the Woodcrest Summer Reading Program.

\$10 million pledged by Kaiser Permanente.

I led the charge to get the county into the game on this and even offered as much as \$100,000 of our district's community improvement money to get the ball rolling. The payoff, I believe, will be more primary care doctors in the region who can tackle chronic health problems and help our residents lead healthier lives.

I have found it sobering to hear UCR medical school officials describe how residents here suffer from high mortality rates from illnesses such as heart disease and prostate cancer. My understanding from UCR is that we have about 36 primary care doctors for every



UCR CARILLON PHOTO: GABE ACOSTA

100,000 or so people in the Inland Empire, compared to about 80 such doctors per 100,000 people elsewhere in the country. I also have read predictions that the area will need another 3,000 doctors by 2030 just to keep up with population growth.

Clearly, there is an opportunity to vastly improve healthcare

options for our residents, and the UCR Medical School is the linchpin to that effort. Please join me in continuing to support a project that not only will create a massive ripple effect, but also will support the development of additional medical resources for our region. I look forward to providing you with additional updates in the future. ■

New Career Centers for Job Seekers

BUSINESS OWNERS and out-of-work residents of Riverside and Southwest Riverside County have new and expanded service centers where they can find one another and help reduce the county's unemployment rate.

The county has opened new Workforce Development Centers in Riverside and Murrieta that offer an improved environment where people who are seeking a job can find helpful services, and where business owners who are looking to hire can work more closely with county job developers.

The new centers are bigger, more spacious and more professional than ever before. They are part of the county's effort to pair job seekers with local businesses that are seeking qualified employees. The centers include training options, computer work stations, classes

and meeting rooms.

The new Riverside center is located at 1325 Spruce Street. The phone number there is 951-955-3100.

The new Murrieta center is located at 30135 Technology Drive. That number is 951-304-5900.



The centers include training options, computer work stations, classes and meeting rooms.

Workforce Development provides many services to businesses in an effort to help local businesses grow and, in the process, reduce the local unemployment rate. They also

offer a centralized location where potential employees can work on their skill sets and job searches.

For example, Workforce Development will pre-screen potential employees and provide a business that plans to do some hiring with a list of potential interviewees who meet the qualifications set forth by the business. Workforce Development also can assist companies with receiving reimbursements for training.

If your company is expanding its workforce, I encourage you to pay a visit to one of the new Workforce Development Centers, or one of the other such facilities spread around Riverside County. And if you have been laid off and are looking for a new job, please keep in mind that these centers are a great place to start your search. ■

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Employee Pension Reform Needed Now

WITH A PROJECTED DEFICIT of more than \$130 million for the 2010-11 fiscal year, we are facing some hard choices as a county.

I am pushing to bring down our spending so it is more in line with our declining sales tax revenues. But I truly believe we will not solve this financial crisis—and any other that comes down the pike in the coming decades—unless we reform our employee pension process.

We already are about \$800 million in the hole when it comes to covering our \$4.5 billion pension obligations during the next 30 years. As it is, we spend about \$155 million a year on retirement costs. And those figures are expected to be \$20 million worse by 2012 as a result of investment losses suffered by the California Public Employees' Retirement System, which manages the county's

retirement account.

Make no mistake—our current budget problems are severe. The board, and myself personally, have pushed all departments to cut their budgets, in part because any economic recovery we see in 2010-11 is expected to be slow at best. Unemployment is forecast to be



at least 10 percent until at least 2012, meaning there will be no dramatic uptick in sales tax revenues, which pay for many county services.

But that \$130 million budget deficit for 2010-11 pales in comparison with the \$800 million in unmet pension obligations during the next three decades. The potential for pension costs to continue to rise will, I think, eventually put at risk our ability to provide high-quality services to county residents, even when the economy is doing better.

We recently voted as a board to set aside \$6.2 million to better cover the retirement costs of current and retired employees. That action was prudent, but we need to act now, not to tweak the system, but to overhaul it. Pension reform already has happened in San Diego and Orange counties, and there is no reason why it should not happen here too.

We expect to have some recommendations by this fall from an advisory committee that is studying the issue. Options include changing the retirement benefits for new employees and requiring all employees to pay more of their own money toward retirement.

I urge you to make your concerns about pension reform known, both to me and other members of the Board of Supervisors. Unless we change the system in a meaningful way, the county budget will continue to struggle even after the economy has rebounded. ■