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The District 3 Slate

May 2005 County Supervisor Pam Slater-Price

"The typical commuter loses nearly 50 hours annually to traffic delays."

County Supervisor
Pam Slater-Price

Debbie Reynolds enjoyed "Singing In The Rain" but she will prove she - and seniors like her - have no intention of just fading away.

The star of "The Unsinkable Molly Brown" plus 30 other films and Broadway productions is the keynote speaker at "Vital Aging Conference 2005," hosted by the county Health and Human Services Agency on June 9 at the Town & Country Convention Center in Mission Valley.

You won't want to miss this inspiring event. Debbie, who at age 73 still performs 40 weeks a year in Las Vegas, is fantastic.

Get your tickets by calling (800) 82-SHARP or by going to www.sandiego.net-workofcare.org.The $5 admission is worth it!

Pam

Traffic Summit Searches For Elusive Answers To Gridlock

Congestion is more than frustration - it equates to a loss of productivity for business and diminishes the quality of life for those stuck in traffic.

Therefore, "gridlock" is the one word that angers San Diegans countywide. As chairwoman of the Board of Supervisors, I pledged to expedite projects that ease the flow of traffic through our county. I also believe we can - and must - partner with large employers to find ways to reduce congestion while improving their ability to be competitive in the global environment.

The "Business Partnerships for Traffic Solutions" summit organized by my office in late April was attended by more than 90 major employers and transportation leaders.

There were dual purposes for holding this traffic summit:

- Update business leaders about what is being done to ease traffic congestion countywide.
- Solicit ideas from the private sector for ways to reduce the number of vehicles on the road, especially during peak commute hours.

The typical commuter loses nearly 50 hours annually to traffic delays. Clearly, we cannot continue with business as usual if we expect San Diego County to continue to prosper.

> "The only way to reduce congestion is for transportation planners to link services that deliver these people to their work locations."

The conference was cosponsored by SBC, SDG&E, Qualcomm, SDSU and UCSD, representing San Diego County's largest employers.

Since the 1980s, vehicle trips per lane of freeway has increased by 105 percent but freeways have seen their size increase less than 17 percent.

Voter passage of TransNet II will help by providing the funding necessary to "fast track" planning and construction of I-5 and I-15. Currently, efforts funded through TransNet I are focusing on completing two segments of SR 76 in Oceanside creating an east-west link between the two major freeways. The trolley is being extended north from Old Town as part of the Mid-Coast loop, linking UTC and UCSD with the rest of the system.

Construction of new freeway lanes is not the only answer, however. Traffic will get worse if we do not embrace new ideas and cooperative ventures. Fifty thousand people move to our county each year. Each day, more than 977,000 workers drive alone to their jobs. Fifty thousand people commute from Tijuana. Thirty thousand commute from Temecula and Riverside County.

The only way to reduce congestion is for transportation planners to link services that deliver these people to their work locations. I believe people would again embrace carpooling – especially when a gallon of gasoline costs more than $2.50!

It will take time to expand and modernize roads and freeways.

COMMON SENSE SAYS...

Dr. Wilma Wooten, a deputy public health officer, joins me for the "Take A Break - Don't Shake!" news conference to raise awareness of the dangers of shaking babies and young children. Each year, nearly 1,300 children experience severe or fatal head trauma from child abuse, and 30 per 100,000 children under age 1 suffer inflicted brain injuries. One in four shaken babies die.

Fight The Bite And Avoid Nile Virus...

As the soaking of '05 diminishes, the threat of infection from mosquitoes infected with West Nile Virus escalates. But before overreacting, there is good news.

County vector-control staff have been on the offensive against mosquitoes, spraying high-risk areas to keep mosquito populations under control. The Board of Supervisors proclaimed Aug. 25 to May 1 as West Nile Virus Awareness Week.

The federal government in early May earmarked to California an additional $2.16 million to keep West Nile from growing into an epidemic. The virus has been detected this year in 21 of 54 California counties; however, there is only one confirmed case of exposure in a person.

Last year was the first full year when West Nile Virus was active nationwide. It infected 2,470 people and killed 88. Two cases were reported in San Diego County last year; one was confirmed to have been infected at the Port of Los Angeles.

To help county residents, the Department of Environmental Health is distributing an educational 20-minute video to local libraries that features both English and Spanish formats. The videos explain how a family can protect themselves from mosquitoes, how to eliminate breeding sites, and the signs and symptoms of West Nile Virus.

The video is also available at the website **www.SDFighttheBite.com**. The website features links that offer the information in Chinese, French, Hmong, Lao, Portuguese, Russian, Tagalog, Vietnamese and Cambodian.

A person can reduce the risk of becoming infected by eliminating breeding sites (where water puddles and remains undisturbed) and remaining inside at dusk and dawn. If a person needs to be outside at these times, they should wear long sleeves and pants and use a repellent containing DEET.

Common breeding sources include:

- **Bird baths, ponds and poorly maintained swimming pools.**
- **Sagging tarps covering woodpiles, boats, RVs and pools.**
- **Children's toys and tire swings.**
- **Clogged rain gutters, wheelbarrows and uncovered garbage cans.**
- **Plant saucers, lawn art and ornaments.**
- **Animal troughs and pets' water bowls.**
- **Tool sheds, flat roofs and seldom-used machinery.**

For more information on West Nile Virus, or to report a dead bird or potential breeding area, call (888) 551-INFO or visit the county website. Mosquito-eating fish are available at 14 locations countywide.

GLOBAL HONOR

It was with great honor that I recognized Carolyn Chase of San Diego EarthWorks for her efforts on behalf of the 16th annual EarthFair. The event was held May 1 in Balboa Park. Carolyn's dedication and hard work resulted in a larger-than-anticipated crowd this year.

... Wet Winter Delays Start Of Fire Season

While the third wettest year in county history impacted tourism during spring break and drove hardy San Diegans to search elsewhere for sunshine, it has had two distinct benefits.

The first is it has helped alleviate - not end - the drought that plagued our county for the past seven years. Snowpack in the Sierra mountains ranges between 144 percent and 174 percent of normal. Melting snow fills aquifiers and helps provide hydroelectric power.

The second consequence is a fortunate delay in the traditional start of fire season. It was an unexpected relief when Julian and the Cuyamaca mountains braced for snow in April. Just seven of the 33 air tankers under contract to the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management are currently able to fly due to mechanical problems. These tankers drop 3,000 gallons of water or fire retardant.

The state of California has 23 fast-attack air tankers capable of dropping 1,200 gallons of water or retardant available during the heat of fire season. The nearest tankers are based at Hemet but there is a proposal to transfer them to the former March air base north of Perris. In addition, the last budget proposal for fiscal year 2005-06 grounds three of the 23 tankers.

Federal officials are debating whether to begin using the Russian Ilyushin-76 Waterbomber, which drops 11,000 gallons on an area the size of 12 football fields. The Russian plane has four times the capacity of its American counterpart in the federal fire fleet, the P-3 Orion. Federal officials could also mobilize eight C-130s that are attached to the Air National Guard. However, those planes would need to be retrofitted to accommodate air drops.

Tour These Gardens, A Step In Time

Those who love a beautiful garden will want to get out their walking shoes when the New Encinitas Garden Festival premiers on May 21.

Activities begin at 10 a.m. at Cottonwood Creek Park. The celebration marks Encinitas' horticultural heritage. Visitors will tour 30 gardens via double-decker buses during the daylong event. A Gardener's Marketplace will offer the latest in plants and accessories.

Cost of the tour is $15 per person. Tickets can be ordered through the Chamber of Commerce and select nurseries in the city. Call (760) 753-6041.

AROUND THE THIRD DISTRICT

Investing in the organizations that invest in improving our neighborhoods is one way to enhance the quality of life that gives the Third District its unique sense of community. The Board of Supervisors approved my requests as outlined below:

CARDIFF BY THE SEA

Lagoon To Feature New Visitor's Center

A longtime vision is about to materialize in Cardiff-by-the-Sea, as the Board of Supervisors approved entering into an agreement to design and build a new San Elijo Lagoon Visitor Center. The center will be on county-owned land in the San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve. The current center consists of two open-air pavilions that lack space for exhibits and cannot fully interpret the many benefits the lagoon offers. The new visitors center is proposed to be a two-story facility showing exhibits and displays of the lagoon's history and ecology. The board approved a $350,000 contract to design the new center plus authorized $275,000 in Proposition 40 funds, which will be used for both the design and construction.

ESCONDIDO

Letting Children Be Children - And Learn To Be Learners

Children need to be children. The Escondido Children's Museum offers programs and exhibits that cultivate school readiness and lifelong learning. This $10,000 grant, contingent on matching funds, will offset the costs associated with providing the residents of San Diego County and their children a unique hands-on educational experience.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY

Teeing Off For A Worthwhile Cause

A woman who is sexually assaulted has different emotional and physical responses to the crime committed against her. I awarded the San Diego County Sheriff's Department's $2,500 to assist with costs associated with its inaugural charity golf tournament for the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART). SART utilizes a victim-sensitive, multi-disciplinary approach to solving cases of sexual assault.

THIS EVENT IS NOT SO TAXING...

Chairwoman Pam Slater-Price announces details of the Earned Income Tax Credit program that enables families to qualify for a special incentive program. The EITC is a refundable tax credit distributed to families who work but earn low wages. The tax credit is one of the largest federal anti-poverty programs and is claimed by an estimated 20 million people. It is credited with lifting millions of people, especially children, out of poverty. The program is run in partnership with United Way of San Diego County. Last year, EITC recipients returned millions of dollars to the San Diego County economy.

SAN MARCOS

Art Opens The Mind And Lifts The Spirit

The arts is a foundation of our classical Western education. Understanding how art and music relates to our lives opens young minds to a better appreciation of math and science. California State University, San Marcos received a $6,000 grant for its "Young at Art" program, which benefits Center ARTES, a university center dedicated to restoring arts education to grades kindergarten through 12.

A WORTHY HONOR

I proudly present a proclamation to Cynthia Charlebois, the director of the Victim Advocate Program in the county District Attorney's Office, marking the program's 25th anniversary. The honor was presented during the annual "Citizen of Courage" luncheon.

These Checks Are No Longer In The Mail

The welfare check is a thing of the past - literally! Beginning May 1, the County of San Diego began converting its public assistance payments to Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards.

The program is operated through the Health and Human Services Agency. The new card, which resembles an ATM card, delivers both cash assistance and food stamps.

Funds are automatically deposited in a client's EBT account and can be assessed as needed.

San Diego County has been a pilot for distributing food stamps through the EBT program for the past 10 years. The new system, called the "Golden State Advantage" card, replaces the old card used for food stamps.

EBT cards can be used at all grocery stores that accept food stamps. There is never a charge to use the Point of Sale terminal for food stamps. Cash benefits can be withdrawn through any ATM or Point of Sale terminal displaying the "Quest" symbol.

"This new system allows the county to save money on postage and printing checks, as well as providing a better control for disbursement of aid," explained agency Director Jean Shepard.

"We want to improve customer service while reducing overhead and time spent by our staff."

PAM'S PERSPECTIVE

Data Shows Frightening Cost Of Obesity

Now it is official - childhood obesity is California's latest crisis. Since I hosted the "School Food Summit" last month, new research reveals the depth of this problem.

"The truth is, the cost of obesity in kids is really small, but only if you're looking at annual costs," explains Eric Finkelstein, coauthor of the 2004 report of the medical costs of obesity. "The problem is obese kids are more likely to become obese adults, and the costs rise as people get older."

Adds Dr. Naomi Neufeld, clinical professor of pediatrics at UCLA: "California's going to fall apart. The people who should be earning money won't be. The people who should be working in the work force are going to be sitting in the hospital with their heart attacks, their strokes, their diabetes."

How did this situation grow into a statewide crisis?

A just-published study by MarketResearch.com reveals all:

• Children and teens eat three times the amount of crackers, pretzels, popcorn and corn chips than fruit and vegetables.

• "Favorite" vegetables are tomatoes and fried potatoes.

• Teens today drink less milk but three times more soda than an earlier generation.

• Teens and kids consume twice the amount of candy and sugar recommended by health guidelines.

• Portions have grown in size. A 6- to 11-year-old girl today consumes 113 more calories each day than a similar child did in the 1980s and 1990s. A teenage boy is ingesting an additional 243 more calories today. In most cases, there is no accompanying increase in exercise.

• Almost every child today eats three snacks per day; 50 percent of these children snack at least five times a day!

This crisis is real and it will affect all of us. Junk food permeates our lives. Vending machines dispense high-sugar, high-calorie items that only encourage students to pay return visits. Nine out of 10 high schools have vending machines; six out of 10 middle schools have them, too.

And, sadly, it is getting harder and harder to pull the plug on these machines. A school can collect between $10,000 and $15,000 annually from its vending machines. This money helps supplement arts education, athletics, drama production ... the list goes on and on.

In late April, the state Department of Health Services issued a report documenting that California's overweight adults cost taxpayers $21.7 billion in taxpayer services in 2000. It broke down to $11.2 billion in lost productivity, $10.2 billion in direct and indirect medical costs, and $338 million in worker's comp payouts. These numbers put this crisis in real dollars. Your company's worker's comp premiums are higher due to the costs of obese workers.

An Oregon study found obese workers take twice as many sick days and represent $6,822 in lost wages due to sick days, vs. $4,496 for a non-obese worker.

The California study did offer a ray of hope: Improve adults' physical activity by just 5 percent and taxpayers will save $6 billion over five years.

The issue is not, "Can we as a society afford to do this?" but "Can we afford not to make these lifestyle changes?"

Sums up UCLA's Dr. Neufeld: "What's cheaper? Teaching them home-ec so they know how to grill a chicken or paying for coronary heart disease?"

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