

West County Newsletter

DECEMBER 2008

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A message from Supervisor John Gioia



As we enter the holiday season, I have mixed emotions. I am hopeful and inspired by the historic election

of Barack Obama.

However, our President Elect has a tough challenge ahead as our country faces its most serious financial crisis since the Great Depression.

We're feeling the effects of this crisis at the County.

I've been an elected public official for 20 years and I strongly believe in the power of government to improve the health and well-being of our communities.

I have never before felt this level of pain and frustration in having to make so many budget cuts, which decrease vital public services to our most vulnerable residents.

Contra Costa County depends on local property tax revenue and funding from the State and Federal Government to run its health, criminal justice, and social service programs.

Over the last 10 years, property tax revenues in our County have increased an average of 8% per year.

This year; however, we saw zero growth in property tax revenue.

California, facing a \$28 billion deficit over the next 18 months, is slashing its level of funding to counties. Economic experts predict that it will be at least several years before revenue growth starts to increase again.

To weather this storm, the County is looking at ways to operate more efficiently and control its costs. This will depend on a cooperative partnership with our employee unions. We all need to sacrifice in the interests of preserving services for our residents.

In the long run, we will need major structural fiscal reform to change the dysfunctional way that revenues flow from state to local government. It will take strong bipartisan cooperation for this to happen.

We've been able to work together in a bipartisan way on our Board of Supervisors -- let's urge our legislators to do the same.

My hope for the New Year is that the winds of change sweeping across Washington will cause our legislature and Governor to work together to solve our financial crisis.

Even during these challenging times, I am inspired that our community comes together to help those most in need.

That is the true holiday spirit.

Happy Holidays.

- John Gioia



Tis the Season for Thinking of Others

“Supervisor Gioia is pleased to sponsor two holiday programs with a long history of helping hundreds of West County residents...”

Every winter, Supervisor Gioia supports charitable giving to help our less fortunate neighbors. This year is particularly bleak, as many families are impacted by the economic downturn.

Supervisor Gioia is pleased to sponsor two holiday programs with a long history of helping hundreds of West County residents -- the Verde School Coat & Toy Drive, and the seasonal fundraising drive of the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano.

Contra Costa County Cares Holiday Food (Fund) Drive

The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano is seeking cash donations to purchase and distribute food for low-income residents. The Food Bank is experiencing a record demand for food this year.

While the food bank accepts donations of nonperishable food, this year it's focusing its efforts on cash, which feeds more people than actual food, thanks to relationships with producers and distributors. For as little as \$1, the Food Bank can provide three meals.

This year the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors and the Solano County Board of Supervisors are challenging each other to a “food fight” — a friendly competition to see which county raises more for the food bank. This includes donations from board members, county staff, and residents.

To Donate: Checks payable to the “Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano” can be mailed or dropped off at Supervisor Gioia's Office, 11780 San Pablo Ave., Suite D, El Cerrito, 94530.

10th Annual Verde Elementary School Toy & Coat Drive

Toys and new coats (sizes 6T – 16) are being collected for the children of Verde Elementary School in North Richmond. This annual event is sponsored by Supervisor Gioia and the City of Richmond. Items will be distributed to the Verde students on December 19.

To Donate: Drop off toys or coats at Supervisor Gioia's Office, 11780 San Pablo Avenue, Suite D., El Cerrito, 94530. Checks are also accepted to purchase toys or coats and may be made payable to “Neighborhood House of North Richmond c/o Verde Toy & Coat Drive.”

For more information on either of these efforts contact Luz Gomez at Supervisor Gioia's office at 510-374-3231.

County Launches Effort to Upgrade Kensington Library

Dream an ideal library. What's it like? This is what Kensington residents are being asked as part of a process to remodel and improve the community's county-run library. Supervisor Gioia and County Librarian Anne Cain are sponsoring periodic town hall meetings to discuss library improvements. While residents are encouraged to dream big, improvements are being prioritized as funds are limited.

The county has recommended a list of upgrades for the library which will be paid for with an existing library capital improvements fund. This includes safety basics such as updating the sprinkler and

heating/air-conditioning systems, and making the bathrooms ADA accessible.

The community is being asked to provide input on projects to tackle after this “must do” list. Ideas suggested include expanding the library to include a children's room or study area, and adding a self-check-out system. At this stage, it's unclear how far the capital improvements budget will stretch, especially as initial estimates for work have increased. A community fundraising effort is being given serious consideration.

For more information contact Liz Ruhland, Kensington librarian at 510-524-3043.

Groundbreaking County Industrial Safety Law Makes Facilities Safer

January 2009 marks the 10th anniversary of the Board of Supervisors' adoption of Contra Costa County's groundbreaking Industrial Safety Ordinance, which has been credited with making industrial facilities safer in our County.

What's more, Contra Costa County has been recognized by the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board as a national model for the way safety inspections are done.

The City of Richmond also adopted the County's law in 2002 and gave the County Health Department the responsibility of enforcement.

The law requires oil refineries and chemical plants to implement a safety program that is the most stringent in the United States. The County's Hazardous Materials Division performs in-depth inspections at each facility every three years and also has the ability to perform audits and unannounced inspections of industrial plants.

If there is a chemical accident, the law requires the operator of the facility to perform a "root cause analysis" to determine the real cause of the accident and take steps to correct the problem.

Since passage of this law, refineries and chemical plants have changed the way they do business in Contra Costa County and have implemented safer systems in their industrial processes. As a result, major chemical accidents and releases in the County have been substantially decreased.

For more information on the Industrial Safety Ordinance or to view a list of major chemical accidents and releases, visit www.cchealth.org/groups/hazmat

"Since passage of this law, refineries and chemical plants have changed the way they do business in Contra Costa County..."

Breakfast with John

Supervisor Gioia's popular community breakfasts will continue in January at the RYSE Youth Center in Central Richmond, in February at the Young Adult Empowerment Center in North Richmond, and in March at the George Miller III Headstart preschool in South Richmond.

Dates are still being finalized; check Supervisor Gioia's website for final details after the New year at www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/depart/dis1 or call our office at 510-374-3231.

Breakfasts are held monthly at rotating locations in West County.

Picture This!



(left) Supervisor Gioia and daughter Emilia get ready for this year's California Coastal

Clean-up on 9/20/08.



(below) Some of the trash pulled from the Richmond Marina



Striking a pose before the Montalvin Playground ribbon cutting on 12/6/08. (front left to right) Gabriel Lemus, Brian Balbas, Bob Van Bibber, Supervisor Gioia, Emilia Gioia, John Beith, Irene Thompson



Youth Leadership members celebrate the Grand Opening of The RYSE Center in Richmond on 10/18/08



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 e-mail: dist1@bos.cccounty.us
 Office Hours: Monday – Friday
 8:30 a.m. – 12:00 noon
 1:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Our Website:
<http://www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/depart/dis1>

Other Elected Officials

House of Representatives:
 Congressman George Miller, III
 (District 7)
 (510) 262-6500 - Richmond Office
 (925) 602-1880 - District Office

Congresswoman Ellen Tauscher
 (District 10)
 (925) 932-8899 or
 (925) 757-7187 - District Offices

State Senate & Assembly:
 Senator Mark DeSalunier
 (District 7)
 (925) 602-6593 – District Office

Senator Loni Hancock
 (District 9)
 (510) 286-1333 - District Office

Assemblywoman Nancy Skinner
 (District 14)
 (510) 559-1406 - District Office

Assemblyman Tom Torlakson
 (District 11)
 (925) 372-7990 - District Office

Commission & Volunteer Opportunities

Interested in community issues? Want to get involved? The County has numerous citizen boards that advise the Supervisors on a range of issues. For a complete list of openings check the county's website at www.co.contra-costa.ca.us.

Click on Board Advisory Body Information. Applications are available online, or through our office. There are current openings on:

Mental Health Commission
 Karen Shuler 925-313-4310

Alcohol and Other Drugs Advisory Board,
 Fatima Matal Sol 925-313-6311

El Sobrante R-9 Committee and El Sobrante Municipal Advisory Committee
 Terrance Cheung 510-374-3231

Youth Commission
 Joan Tomasini 925-646-5940.

Regular Public Meetings

CONTRA COSTA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
Meets at 9:30 am every Tuesday at the County Administration Building, 651 Pine St, in Martinez.

El Cerrito City Council
 Meets at 7 pm on the first and third Mondays of every month at the El Cerrito City Hall, 10890 San Pablo Avenue, El Cerrito.

El Sobrante Municipal Advisory Council
 Meets at 7 pm on the second Wednesday of every month at the El Sobrante Library, 4191 Appian Way, off San Pablo Dam Road.

Kensington Municipal Advisory Council
 Meets at 7 pm the last Tuesday of every month at the Kensington Community Center, 59 Arlington, in Kensington.

Montalvin Manor Redevelopment Advisory Committee
 Meet at 6:30 pm on the second Thursday of every month at the Montalvin Elementary School on Christine Drive.

North Richmond Municipal Advisory Council
 Meets at 5 pm the second Tuesday of every month at 515 Silver Avenue in North Richmond

Richmond City Council
 Meets at 7 pm every first and third Tuesday at Richmond City Hall, 1401 Marina Way South, Richmond

San Pablo City Council
 Meets at 7 pm on the first and third Mondays of every month at City Hall, 13831 San Pablo Avenue, Maple Hall, Building Two, San Pablo.