

Students honored for their work to make a difference

By RYANNE PERSINGER, Staff writer
Visalia Times-Delta, June 20, 2006

Ricardo Reyes said some of his friends and family have asthma and other respiratory problems, and the Valley's poor air quality doesn't help.

He said he and his brother try to cut back on pollution by riding their bikes for miles, gardening and spending lots of time outside his house so that they don't waste electricity.

This year Ricardo, along with Tanner Adlard, both students at Visalia's Hurley Elementary School, were rewarded for their nonpolluting efforts as grand prize winners of the Make a Difference in Air Quality essay and poster contest.

Air quality contest winners announced

By RYANNE PERSINGER, Staff writer
Visalia Times-Delta and Tulare Advance-Register, June 19, 2006

The winners from the annual Make a Difference in Air Quality essay and poster contest, were awarded with certificates at the Tulare County Association of Governments meeting on Monday.

Tanner Adlard, a second-grade student and Ricardo Reyes, a fifth-grade student, both from Hurley Elementary in Visalia, won a \$500 certificate for the purchase of a bike, helmet and accessories.

Adlard won for her essay on the effects of pollution and Reyes won for his poster, which pictured children participating in nonpollution causing activities, including riding bicycles, running and gardening.

Countywide, 319 entries were received from kindergarten to high school students.

Show us the Money...

...and we'll show you the research projects

By LORENA ANDERSON - BEE STAFF WRITER
Modesto Bee, Tuesday, June 20, 2006

MERCED — Hippopotamus sweat and a mud-daubing wasp's tiny waist might not seem like things that could change the world.
But you never know.

Researchers at the University of California at Merced aren't sure yet, either. That's why they keep working and seeking out grants for their studies.

Last school year, researchers pulled in about \$7 million in a variety of grants. About 60 percent of the money is from federal organizations such as the National Science Foundation. The rest comes from the state, from private donors and industry and from foundations.

Since the university began hiring faculty in July 2003, it has brought in about \$22 million for research.

The state's newest university has two official research bodies: the Sierra Nevada Research Institute and the World Cultures Institute. SNRI's scientists look into issues such as water and watersheds, population growth and development, air quality, fire ecology and climate change. The World Cultures Institute concentrates on themes in the San Joaquin Valley such as economics, religion, migration, arts and ethnic identities.

But there's a lot of lab work going on that people don't hear much about, in areas such as solar energy, child development, immunology, genetic processes, communication and education. There's also Christopher Viney's work on the mud-daubing wasps.

'Nature makes small machines'

He's looking at them for inspiration in nanotechnology — how materials and devices can be built on an extremely small scale.

A \$500,000 grant from the National Science Foundation helps him and his colleagues explore possibilities that could lead to, for example, a minuscule machine that travels around in someone's bloodstream, seeking out, and maybe even cleaning, plaque-plagued arteries.

"It's not far-fetched," Viney said. "Nature makes small machines all the time. Look at the antenna on an ant. It detects things, guides the ant. ... Anything nature makes, it starts small and builds up."

He's also the one checking out hippo sweat because hippos don't sunburn, naturally repel bugs and don't get skin infections. Maybe their sweat can help humans stay protected, too.

In another lab at the school's Castle Airport facility, Anne Kelley works on hyper-Raman spectrology. That's science-speak for firing lasers into a variety of materials to see how light scatters when it hits the objects within.

Writing proposals big part of job

These aren't "death-ray" lasers, she said with a laugh, but low-level beams that could provide ideas for how to make fiber-optic communications cheaper and more energy-efficient. Someday, those lasers and the scattered lights they produce also could be used to help see and diagnose problems in living cells.

Though the researchers spend a lot of time in their labs and teaching, they also must write grant proposals — not the easiest part of the job, considering they can be 40-plus pages long. UC Merced applied for nearly \$32 million in grants, officials said. Kelley, who had experience with research grants at another university, said the \$7 million UC Merced got is about normal.

At bigger schools, research projects usually involve only graduate students. But because UC Merced still is such a small school, the professors often use undergraduates, which helps with their studies and expands their career options for the future, Viney said.

Students involved in research

Emily Reed, 20, of Merced is working with Viney this summer. She sees the research projects as "a really good opportunity.

Although the university requires biological science majors such as Reed to complete at least one unit of research, the opportunities are plentiful — and not only in biological sciences.

Reed, for instance, is working in engineering and said it has "the potential to change what I want to do." She said she thinks it could open up a lot of job opportunities for her.

Kelley, who had similar chances when she attended UC Riverside in its early days, said that was particularly exciting for an undergraduate student.

"It's one thing to read something out of a textbook," she said. "Here, students are being taught by the people who are actually doing the work that will be in next year's textbooks."

Planners prepare for Valley's future transportation needs

ERIN SHERBERT - Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Saturday, Jun 17, 2006

STOCKTON - Anyone who drives the region's often-crowded roads can see evidence of population growth in the San Joaquin Valley.

And more is on the way.

San Joaquin County's population is expected to rise to 1.7 million by 2050 - it's 758,000 now - and area planners want to be ready to accommodate this growth.

On June 28, hundreds of city leaders, business representatives and environmentalists will join others from all over the San Joaquin Valley at a summit in Fresno to begin working on a massive plan that will guide future transportation projects and land-use planning in the San Joaquin Valley.

The state in January granted the region \$2 million to pay for mapping, traffic analysis and other data gathering in all eight San Joaquin Valley counties, officials said.

The blueprint these leaders will devise over the next two years will help the region determine where to develop housing and business parks, where to invest transportation money and improve public transit connections as well as how to combat traffic congestion and air pollution as more people move to the region, said Michael Swearingen, senior regional planner for the San Joaquin Council of Governments, the county's transportation planning agency.

"We are developing different scenarios on how build-out is going to happen," Swearingen said. "Where are all the houses going to go? Where are people going to live?"

After the June summit, local planners will host community workshops in each county to get input from residents and community members.

Creating such a blueprint will put the San Joaquin Valley in a better position to garner state funds for future transportation and economic development projects, said Richard Cummings, director of research and communications for the Great Valley Center, a Modesto-based think tank.

Already, state officials have turned their attention to the Central Valley over the past year, saying it is critical to California's economy.

Last year, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed a 26-member committee to address the future economic and transportation issues of the San Joaquin Valley. The committee met in December, proposing an ambitious \$6 billion plan to widen and improve Highway 99, one of the region's most heavily traveled thoroughfares.

Also, the governor recently signed legislation placing a nearly \$20 billion transportation bond on the November ballot. The only project earmarked in the spending plan was \$1 billion to upgrade Highway 99 from Kern to Sacramento counties.

Today, more than 100,000 vehicles travel the Stockton metropolitan area of Highway 99 daily. Trucks account for about 19 percent of the traffic, according to the state Department of Transportation.

"(It's) the first time we had this attention and energy around the San Joaquin Valley," Cummings said. "We are beginning to come out of the shadows of the Bay Area and Southern California."

16 states, including Calif., challenge EPA over mercury rules

By BETH DeFALCO

In the Bakersfield Californian, June 20, 2006

New Jersey's attorney general filed a court petition Monday on behalf of 16 states, including California, challenging the federal Environmental Protection Agency's new mercury pollution rules.

The petition asks a federal judge to reactivate a lawsuit filed last year challenging a rule known as "cap-and-trade."

Cap-and-trade allows power plants to buy emissions reduction credits from plants whose emissions fall below target levels, rather than installing their own mercury emissions controls. It is to go into effect in 2010.

The lawsuit was put on hold in October after the EPA agreed to reconsider the rules, but on May 31, the agency announced revisions didn't include cap-and-trade.

"After six months of stalling, EPA not only failed to address the grave dangers posed to communities and children by its cap-and-trade program for mercury emissions, it made the program worse by further weakening standards," New Jersey Attorney General Zulima Farber said. The petition was filed in federal court in Washington.

Mercury from smokestacks can enter waterways and be consumed by humans who eat contaminated fish. The toxic metal can cause nerve damage and damage the heart, brain and kidneys, according to the EPA.

The states argue that the cap-and-trade system will endanger children near some power plants that pollute but use credits to do it legally.

The lawsuit also challenges an EPA decision to delist coal- and oil-fired power plants from regulations requiring utilities to use the strictest emissions control technology possible to block emissions.

A message left Monday by The Associated Press at the EPA's Washington office was not immediately returned.

The agency has defended its mercury rules in the past, saying they will reduce mercury emissions by 70 percent and they represent the nation's first attempt to control such emissions.

The states included on the petition are: Wisconsin, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont.

Interior boss shows interest in parks

by Mike Soraghan, Denver Post

Tri-Valley Herald, Tues. June 20, 2006

WASHINGTON — New Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne signaled Monday that he wants fewer snowmobiles, off-road vehicles and cell phone towers in America's national parks.

It was a reversal of a philosophy developed under his predecessor, Gale Norton, that proposed loosening standards for park managers when deciding to allow uses like motorized recreation. That suggestion had ignited a furor among environmentalists and parks advocates and started a philosophical debate about the state of the country's national parks.

But Kempthorne on Monday used his first public policy announcement to reverse direction and endorse the "no impairment" standard that some have taken to calling "do no harm."

"When there is a conflict between conserving resources unimpaired for future generations and the use of those resources, conservation will be predominant," Kempthorne said, standing atop Interior Department headquarters with the Washington Monument and Jefferson Memorial in the background.

Kempthorne declined to contrast his parks policy with Norton. But he highlighted that he was standing with leaders of the National Parks Conservation Association and the Outdoor Industry Association. Both groups had criticized Norton and the park management policies considered under her watch.

The Norton aide who had sought more freedom for snowmobiles and off-road vehicles, Paul Hoffman, was not at the ceremony.

"This is as good as, and in a couple of cases better than, current policies," said NCPA President Thomas Kiernan.

The highly charged issue of snowmobiles in Yellowstone is a separate issue, which comes up for another decision in the fall. But environmentalists say they hope the new plan may signal that Kempthorne would be willing to restore the ban sought by the Clinton administration.

Critics said that the policies developed under Norton subtly tilted the balance of recreational uses toward snowmobiles. For example, park tradition and rules published in 2001 said uses should not "impair" the parks. The Hoffman draft would only ban uses that cause permanent damage. Since the noise of a snowmobile is temporary, it would be allowed.

Even a more formal draft, developed by the department after the Hoffman proposal ignited a furor, would have made it harder for park superintendents to eliminate harmful uses, said Kristen Bregelof The Wilderness Society.

But the policies announced Monday say "a key tenet of park management is preventing the impairment of natural and cultural resources."

Sen. Ken Salazar, D-Colo., who sought hearings on the policies after Hoffman's proposed changes to the parks rulebook published in 2001, said he was pleased with Kempthorne's announcement.

"Today's draft restores the stronger protection of soundscapes, air quality, and clear skies contained in the 2001 policies," Salazar said.

Mohave Facility Won't Be Reopened

Edison says it can't find a profitable way to operate the heavily polluting power plant.

By Marc Lifsher, staff writer

L.A. Times, June 20, 2006

After months of negotiations with two Indian tribes and the world's largest coal company, Southern California Edison Co. said Monday that it couldn't find a profitable way to reopen its heavily polluting Mohave power plant on the California-Nevada border.

Edison mothballed the giant coal-fueled generating station Jan. 1, a deadline imposed by a settlement in an environmental lawsuit that required the installation of about \$1 billion of pollution-control equipment.

Since then, the Rosemead-based utility and its minority partners, including the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, have been working to cut deals that would reopen the plant - even as recently as Friday. Edison needed to secure coal to operate the facility and water to push pulverized coal through a 270-mile pipeline from a mine in northeastern Arizona to the plant's Laughlin, Nev., location.

"It's simply not feasible to move forward at this time," Edison Senior Vice President Richard Rosenblum said.

Edison, a subsidiary of Edison International, told more than 200 workers at the power plant Monday that they would be laid off.

Edison abandoned plans to revive the Mohave plant for a combination of reasons, including the possibility that California would begin capping emissions of greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming, Rosenblum said. Another factor was the 2026 expiration of contracts with Nevada for Colorado River water to cool Mohave's turbines, he said.

Edison's 56% share of Mohave's 1,580 megawatts provided low-cost electricity to about 7% of the utility's 13 million customers. However, the company said Mohave's loss shouldn't threaten Southland electricity supplies because Edison recently began operating a new natural-gas-fired power plant in Redlands.

Edison hasn't decided whether to decommission or sell the Mohave plant, Rosenblum said.

Edison's announcement that it wouldn't push to reopen Mohave "caught us by surprise ... and is not good news for the Navajo Nation," tribal spokesman George Hardeen said. The California utility had given no indication of its change of stance during negotiations with the tribes Friday, Hardeen said.

The co-owners of the coal, the 250,000-member Navajo Nation and the 7,000-member Hopi tribe, are expected to lose hundreds of high-paying mining jobs and about \$40 million in annual royalty payments and other revenue from the mine's operator, Peabody Energy Corp.

But environmentalists said they weren't surprised that Edison gave up efforts to retrofit a plant that was one of the West's dirtiest. Mohave spewed an average of 2,000 tons of soot a year in 2002 and 2003, obscuring views of the Grand Canyon, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Mohave also annually released an average of 19,000 tons of nitrogen oxides and 40,000 tons of sulfur dioxides during the same period, the agency said.

"We were doubtful that Edison would be able to keep the plant open," said Roger Clark of the Grand Canyon Trust in Flagstaff, Ariz., which sued Mohave under the federal Clean Air Act in 1999, along with the Sierra Club and the National Parks Conservation Assn.

Clark said he hoped that Edison and other utilities would invest in wind and solar power projects to provide California ratepayers with clean energy and compensate the Navajo and Hopi tribes for lost jobs and tax revenue.

Shuttering Mohave is a step toward meeting Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's goal of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 25% from forecasted levels by 2020, said Bernadette Del Chiaro, a statehouse lobbyist for Environment California, a group backing a bill that would set caps on carbon dioxide pollution.

"When you find yourself in a hole, the first thing you should do is stop digging," she said.

According to a survey released by Environment California on Monday, carbon dioxide emissions in the United States nearly doubled between 1960 and 2001, with volume increasing dramatically in the 1990s.

California's efforts to regulate greenhouse gas emissions should make Mohave unattractive to potential buyers, said Rob Smith of the Sierra Club.

"The new owners would have the same problems as the current owners," Smith said. "Edison has had a hard time saying that Mohave is a bad idea, but everyone else says that we have to move on."

States File Petition Vs. EPA Mercury Rules

By Beth DeFalco, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, June 19, 2006

Trenton, N.J. (AP) -- New Jersey's attorney general filed a court petition Monday on behalf of 16 states challenging the federal Environmental Protection Agency's new mercury pollution rules.

The petition asks a federal judge to reactivate a lawsuit filed last year challenging a rule known as "cap-and-trade."

Cap-and-trade allows power plants to buy emissions reduction credits from plants whose emissions fall below target levels, rather than installing their own mercury emissions controls. It is to go into effect in 2010.

The lawsuit was put on hold in October after the EPA agreed to reconsider the rules, but on May 31, the agency's announced revisions didn't include cap-and-trade.

"After six months of stalling, EPA not only failed to address the grave dangers posed to communities and children by its cap-and-trade program for mercury emissions, it made the program worse by further weakening standards," New Jersey Attorney General Zulima Farber said. The petition was filed in federal court in Washington.

Mercury from smokestacks can enter waterways and be consumed by humans who eat contaminated fish. The toxic metal can cause nerve damage and damage the heart, brain and kidneys, according to the EPA.

The states argue that the cap-and-trade system will endanger children near some power plants that pollute but use credits to do it legally.

The lawsuit also challenges an EPA decision to delist coal- and oil-fired power plants from regulations requiring utilities to use the strictest emissions control technology possible to block emissions.

The agency defends its mercury rules, saying they represent the nation's first attempt to control such emissions and will reduce mercury emissions by 70 percent.

"Because nobody's air gets cleaner in a courtroom, EPA and the Bush administration are acting now to effectively reduce emissions of mercury from power plants," said EPA spokeswoman Jennifer Wood.

The other states included on the petition are: Wisconsin, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont.

Triple digits ahead

Goodbye to cool spring, hello to searing summer

By Ryan Lillis -- Bee Staff Writer

Sacramento Bee, Tuesday, June 20, 2006

We're about to pay for a downright pleasant spring.

The Sacramento region will be hit with its first major heat spike of the year starting today, when temperatures will begin climbing toward triple digits and stay there until at least the weekend, forecasters predict.

It's a substantial shift from the relatively cool weather the area has experienced over the past month. Temperatures rose to 100 degrees just once in Sacramento -- for a brief period Friday afternoon -- and they were below normal 19 out of 31 days, according to the National Weather Service.

"That is about to end," said Steve Goldstein, a forecaster with the National Weather Service. "We're trying to advertise to people to get ready for the hot weather to arrive."

Temperatures should hit the mid-90s today, and "it's a good bet" the mercury will cap triple digits by Wednesday, Goldstein said. It could reach 105 degrees Thursday, and while the thermometer will dip to the mid-60s at night, the region will not benefit from the Delta breezes that normally make summer evenings tolerable, Goldstein said.

If this year is like most, we're in for many more hot days. Last year the thermometer topped 100 degrees 27 times, and the average summer brings 22 days of 100-plus days, according to the National Weather Service.

With the heat comes a blanket of advisories. [The air quality will be "unhealthy for sensitive groups" starting Thursday, according to the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District](#), and local fire departments are urging caution when using weed trimmers and barbecues, especially around grass made crisp by dry air and low humidity.

"Everything goes from green to gold real fast," said Christian Pebbles, a Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District spokesman.

Physicians have their own list of warnings for dealing with the heat, and it all starts with fluids. Keeping hydrated -- especially with sports drinks containing electrolytes -- is the best defense against heat stroke and heat exhaustion.

"People are generally pretty knowledgeable about what it takes," said Dr. Pankaj Patel, head of Kaiser's emergency rooms in Sacramento and Roseville. "Many of these issues are found more commonly with the elderly and those who work outside like roofers, gardeners and construction workers."

Patel said if someone begins showing signs of heat stroke, including nausea, fatigue, confusion and vomiting, they should be taken to an emergency room. Heat stroke can lead to liver or heart failure and usually results in body temperatures of more than 104 degrees.

Besides guzzling fluids -- Patel suggests taking in 8 ounces for every half-hour spent in the heat - - there are many other ways to protect against hot weather. Light clothing and sunscreen help block the sun, and air-conditioned rooms provide perfect sanctuaries.

For Ron Roberts, a veteran of 38 summers working at construction sites in the region, a wet towel around the neck and a jug of water help get him through those long days on the pavement.

"There's no way to beat the heat," the 56-year-old Antelope resident said, working on a sidewalk ramp near the entrance of Arco Arena at East Commerce [Way](#). "It's been real nice and everyone's been a little spoiled, but the heat is gonna happen."

Not everyone hates the heat. Humberto Espinoza of Sacramento said the fishing on the American River at Discovery Park gets better when the water warms. The fish "come alive," he said. His remedy for the heat: a bucket of ice water and some watermelon.

Another option for staying cool is a city pool. All but three of the city's 16 pools are open, and parks department officials expect about 230,000 people to use the facilities this year, according to recreation superintendent Greg Narramore.

In the home, the Sacramento Municipal Utility District suggests keeping windows closed and curtains drawn during the day to keep rooms cool and setting the thermostat at 78 degrees to conserve energy. After posting an \$83 million profit last year, the utility does not intend to raise rates until at least 2008.

As for the garden, experts suggest providing shade for delicate plants and trees in the afternoon and making sure roots are insulated and moist.

States file petition vs. EPA mercury rules

By BETH DeFALCO, Associated Press Writer
Sacramento Bee, Monday, June 19, 2006

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) - New Jersey's attorney general filed a court petition Monday on behalf of 16 states challenging the federal Environmental Protection Agency's new mercury pollution rules.

The petition asks a federal judge to reactivate a lawsuit filed last year challenging a rule known as "cap-and-trade."

Cap-and-trade allows power plants to buy emissions reduction credits from plants whose emissions fall below target levels, rather than installing their own mercury emissions controls. It is to go into effect in 2010.

The lawsuit was put on hold in October after the EPA agreed to reconsider the rules, but on May 31, the agency's announced revisions didn't include cap-and-trade.

"After six months of stalling, EPA not only failed to address the grave dangers posed to communities and children by its cap-and-trade program for mercury emissions, it made the program worse by further weakening standards," New Jersey Attorney General Zulima Farber said. The petition was filed in federal court in Washington.

Mercury from smokestacks can enter waterways and be consumed by humans who eat contaminated fish. The toxic metal can cause nerve damage and damage the heart, brain and kidneys, according to the EPA.

The states argue that the cap-and-trade system will endanger children near some power plants that pollute but use credits to do it legally.

The lawsuit also challenges an EPA decision to delist coal- and oil-fired power plants from regulations requiring utilities to use the strictest emissions control technology possible to block emissions.

The agency defends its mercury rules, saying they represent the nation's first attempt to control such emissions and will reduce mercury emissions by 70 percent.

"Because nobody's air gets cleaner in a courtroom, EPA and the Bush administration are acting now to effectively reduce emissions of mercury from power plants," said EPA spokeswoman Jennifer Wood.

The other states included on the petition are: Wisconsin, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Vermont.

Growers learn to sustain soil

Cover crops, organic matter help preserve planet for next generation

By JOHN HOLLAND- BEE STAFF WRITER
Modesto Bee, Saturday, June 17, 2006

Wine grape growers, who produce something to be consumed in later years, looked to the future in another way this week.

About a dozen of them gathered at a vineyard west of Modesto to talk about sustainability — the idea that people should treat their land in a way that keeps it productive for generations to come.

The vineyard, owned by Modesto Junior College, provided examples of these practices. They included a grassy cover crop between rows, which can protect against erosion, add organic matter to the soil and harbor insects that prey on pests.

"I don't want to go through and disk that vineyard unless I have to," said Mike Morales, a plant science instructor at MJC. "It hasn't been disked in two years."

The event was sponsored by Central California Winegrowers, which aims to boost the quality of San Joaquin Valley grapes, and the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance.

Joe Browde, a Petaluma-based project manager for the alliance, talked about reducing dust, diesel exhaust and pesticide use.

"Air (pollution) in the Central Valley is a monster," he said. "What I mean by that is everybody is looking closely."

He said growers can cut dust and fuel use by doing more than one task during each pass of a tractor. They can reduce pesticide use by creating habitat for desired predators and spraying only when pests are a serious threat, he said.

"Tolerance is the name of the game when it comes to pests," Browde said. "You should be developing some kind of tolerance level, where you tolerate it up to here and then spray."

Most grape growers are doing pest management this way rather than spraying on a strict calendar, said Joe Osterman, a Ceres-area resident who works in grower relations for Allied Grape Growers, a cooperative in Fresno. He said dust control also cuts down on mites that live amid the particles.

Morales said the vineyard cover crop — oats and a wheat-rye cross called triticale — sucked up much of the soil moisture from the rainy winter and spring. That meant that the grapevines did not put out excessive shoot growth, which would hinder the crop, he said.

Paul Farajian, a grape grower in the Livingston area, said he has followed the pestmanagement practices successfully but had trouble with reduced tillage. After a few years, he said, the unturned soil slows water and fertilizer movement.

Ken Tanner of AerWay, which makes farm equipment, demonstrated a device that loosens compacted soil underground while leaving most of the cover crop intact. The device, pulled by a tractor, has blades that slice into the ground and "shatter" the soil as it is lifted slightly, Tanner said.

The treatment improves the circulation of air, water and nutrients to the roots of plants, he said.

Morales said operators of the MJC farm, one of two owned by the college, have spread chipped walnut shells on the dirt roads to keep the dust down.

"We didn't use the water truck once last year," he said.

Sustainable practices are not new, but experts said they are more worthwhile than ever as laws against pollution are tightening. Farming this way also can save growers money.

"We look at this as a way to keep the houses from going on your land," Browde said.

Valley First names board of directors

Modesto Bee, Tues., June 20, 2006

Valley First Credit Union announced its 2006-2007 board of directors and a new director emeritus.

The officers are Chairman Fred Cruz, air quality engineer with the [San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#); Vice Chairman Ken Karn, corporate safety specialist with E.&J. Gallo Winery; Secretary Matt Sinclair, vice president of sales for 5.11 Tactical Co.; and Treasurer Gary Hall, chiropractor. Directors are Rochelle Evans, accountant with Health Services Agency of Stanislaus County; Judy Jensen, partner with Petrulakis Jensen & Friedrich, LLP; and Robert Betts, semi-retired from the title insurance industry in Fresno.

The credit union also honored Wesley Hall, retired from the Stanislaus County Public Health Department, with the position of director emeritus. He has volunteered on a variety of credit union committees. Hall was elected to the credit union board of directors in 1959 and served as chairman for 35 years.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Editorial, June 20, 2006:](#)

Our parks need to be protected

Monday's front page of the Visalia Times-Delta contained an ironic coincidence:

Next to the story about visiting Giant Sequoia National Monument, one of a continuing series of stories about destinations for Tulare County residents, there was a story on an Associated Press review of the state of U.S. national parks. The story about the national monument was filled with the observations about what a unique treasure it is and how people can enjoy the giant sequoias, which are also being protected. The story about the national parks was about how the increased volume of visitors is threatening to despoil some of America's most treasured public places.

Finding a balance between those extremes is at the heart of what will become one of this country's greatest challenges over the next generation. Just to add to the irony: Sequoia and Kings Canyon national parks are finding that balance by accommodating large numbers of people while protecting the natural wonders that attract those crowds.

In some ways, the national parks are becoming victims of their own success. Park visitation has nearly quadrupled in the past 45 years, from 73 million visitors in 1960 to 273 million today. Also those people bring their urban baggage with them: cars, noise, trash and the desire for modern conveniences such as fast food, easy parking and comfortable accommodations. Consequently, places such as Yosemite National Park are forced to consider drastic measures such as banning cars to keep the humans from overrunning nature.

Nature is also under assault from civilization, both in and outside of parks. Environmental problems such as [air and water pollution](#), global warming, erosion and the imbalance of ecosystems don't respect the boundaries of national parks.

The parks are also feeling the pressure from outside. The Associated Press calculated that 1.3 million people had moved into counties surrounding six of the most popular parks: Gettysburg, Great Smoky Mountains, Glacier, Yellowstone, Shenandoah and Everglades. Sequoia and Kings Canyon and Yosemite could not be far down that list.

Parks have already compromised many things to accommodate all the people. A visit to Yellowstone or Grand Canyon at the height of summer is anything but a wilderness experience. The parks have added hotels, parking, helicopter shuttles, restaurants and even cell phone towers. There are a few places left where people can visit and get the same experience as a visitor 150 years ago (Mineral King Valley in Sequoia National Park is one of them), but not as many as there once were. It would be a shame if one day there were nothing left of that experience, if it were impossible to stand on the edge of Grand Canyon and imagine it in pre-Columbian times or gaze at Yosemite Valley with the same wonder as John Muir once did.

Our own local national parks, Sequoia and Kings Canyon, is actually at the forefront of the movement to both provide access to people and protect nature from people. It has moved the most people-intensive facilities away from the giant sequoia trees, which are actually fragile even if they are gigantic. That was the strategy for moving the Wuksachi Lodge away from Giant Forest, removing a number of cabins from Giant Forest and moving parking and walkways. Those changes have allowed more people to use the park while creating less wear on the trees.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon have both reinforced many of the areas that are the most popular visitor sites, such as Grant Grove and Moro Rock, while protecting areas where great numbers of people would be detrimental.

Maintaining that balance will be important for all the national parks, and they will each have to find the solutions that are unique to their character. Obviously, Glacier, Everglades and Gettysburg are all distinctly different and will have to deal with visitors and environmental problems in different ways, but plans can be tailored to all three.

As a nation, we must renew the commitment to preserve these places for future generations so that others can experience the same wonders without having to include qualifiers: "Once you could see all the way across this valley..."

The government, corporate sponsors and private donors can help with the funding for making park improvements.

Even more important is that Americans care about the effort and respect the limits that are necessary to protect these special places.

In our county, it's important for people to visit the parks, cherish them and understand the challenges we face to preserve them.

The Sierra Nevada looks rugged, but it is more vulnerable than it appears. We all have to understand that nature will not stay pristine without a little help from its human partners.

[Visalia Times-Delta, Letter to the Editor, June 20, 2006:](#)

Leaf blowers are a menace to breathable air

The allergy season is well upon us, and the leaf blowers are raising havoc with us sufferers. There ought to be a law limiting the use of these contraptions that hurl clouds of dust into the air and fill our lungs with every latent mold, mildew and microbe blown off the lawns, planter beds, and sidewalks.

After working in the shipyards during the Vietnam War, breathing construction dust while working in the building trades for 30 years, and breathing in all the agri-chemicals from living in a farm community, I now exist on a continuous supply of oxygen at home and carry it with me everywhere I go. Yes, I did smoke for 30 years. No, I do not have lung cancer, but I do suffer from a bad case of pneumonia.

Please, for us old folks and people in general suffering from respiratory problems, let's clean up our acts with the lawn equipment. A rake may take a little longer but may save hundreds of thousands of dollars in medical bills because of respiratory disease.

I don't know how many workers I have seen using the old leaf blower without a respirator themselves. Believe me, young yard worker, the lungs you save may be your own.

FLOYD "NORM" WELLS, Visalia

[Visalia Times-Delta, Letter to the Editor, June 20, 2006:](#)

Reader collects some media distortions

What was up with the hyperbole in the headline, "Survey: Cost of gas plunges" (emphasis added)? My dictionary says that "plunges" means to "enter quickly or suddenly." 1.45 cents per gallon? That is a plunge? Yahoo! I can send my girls to college.

Second. with respect to the immigration/English- only debate in D.C.: Can you say "red herring?" Where is the talk about Iraq; Afghanistan; Social Security; tax parity for the middle class; past and future floods and hurricanes; indicted Bush administration officials and members of Congress; gas prices (see above); the lowering of EPA, food, water and [air quality standards](#); the NSA travails; bottom of the barrel approval ratings and more?

TOM WEISE, Visalia

[Modesto Bee Editorial, Monday, June 19, 2006](#)

Locations create hurdles for projects

Enthusiastic shoppers don't care much about the precise location of shopping centers, so long as they're easy to reach and have sufficient parking. But locations matter a lot to city and county officials, for a couple of reasons:

Sales-tax revenue has become such an integral part of local government budgets that the site of a big tax generator, such as an automobile dealership or a shopping center, helps determine the money available for police, parks and other services.

For instance, an upscale shopping center has been suggested at the north edge of Salida as a way to provide a sufficient economic base for the community to incorporate as a city.

But if upscale shops open in Modesto, it might discourage such a development in Salida — and Modesto will get the increased sales-tax dollars.

Big shopping centers also have negative impacts, many associated with traffic — noise, air pollution and intrusion into nearby residential neighborhoods. There also are the demands on water and sewer systems.

An expansion of Vintage Faire Mall and the addition of the Promenade center only will exacerbate the traffic congestion in that area and at two Highway 99 interchanges — at Beckwith Road and Standiford Avenue, and at Kiernan Avenue.

So, as much as Modestans want more stores and as much as city officials would like the sales-tax income, there will be obstacles for both projects.

[Tri-Valley Herald, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, June 18, 2006](#)

Fourth bore will spare the air

I get mighty tired of the Luddites stalling the construction of the new bore to the Caldecott tunnel.

Environmental impacts include the existing stop-and-go traffic on Highways 24 and 13 in Contra Coast County commute traffic.

This stop-and-go traffic produces much higher volumes of smog chemicals, as well as greenhouse gasses, due to the inefficiency of the automobile engines in that operating condition.

People can claim tree hugging as their profession, but I am tired of the delay. Come to an agreement with Caltrans about any safety concerns, etc., but understand that the new bore will be constructed and neighbors thank you for acting like adults when you do so.

Charles Simkins, Oakland

[Modesto Bee, Editorial \(Short Takes\), Saturday, June 17, 2006](#)

Short Takes

Let's say you've just seen the new Al Gore movie, "An Inconvenient Truth," and you're all excited to do your part to slow global warming. The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District has convinced you that lawn mowers are among the worst polluters — seven or eight times dirtier than cars. In The Bee, you see a story detailing how you can trade in that pollution-belching, gas-powered mower for a discount voucher on a cleaner, greener electric machine. But there's a catch. You have to make the trade in Merced this weekend or in Stockton next weekend.

Huh? Drive 40 or 50 miles to help cleanse the air?

There's got to be a better, smarter way to distribute electric-mower vouchers to everyone who wants and qualifies for one without making them pollute the air to get it.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Saturday, June 17, 2006](#)

Doing great at keeping air clean

Referring to your editorial "We've got miles to go before valley air is clean" (May 26, Page B-6): Here are some numbers available from the California Air Resources Board:

Ozone: Down 16 percent from 1980

SO2: Down 95 percent from 1980
NO2: Down 65 percent from 1980
PM10: Down 18 percent from 1999
PM2.5: Down 50 percent from 1999

With more cars and trucks, we still have cleaner air than a few years ago. We are doing a great job keeping the air clean. We need to be careful about proposing more regulations on all businesses, which hurt the economy and all the folks in our great state.

DONALD ULRICH
Denair

[Capital Press Weekly, Editorial, Fri., June 16, 2006](#)

'Mega dairy' campaign misguided

Another layer of regulation will only drive more dairies out of California, or to close

By Bob Krauter, Capital Press California Editor

You couldn't blame California dairy farmers for feeling a little down on the farm these days. Already under scrutiny from new air rules that take effect this month, dairy farmers are the targets of a new campaign with the backing of a Kennedy - the activist, not the senior U.S. senator from Massachusetts.

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and a few environmental groups want to lock horns with large dairies that they charge are running small dairy farmers out of business and fouling groundwater supplies.

"Mega-dairies cannot just ignore the hormones, antibiotics, bacteria and toxins in their millions of gallons of manure waste at the expense of the health of California families," Kennedy, a longtime environmental advocate, said in a news release.

Environmental activist groups, Baykeeper and the Sierra Club, have jumped on Kennedy's bandwagon, claiming that large dairies have gobbled up small ones and in the process they have produced an environmental hazard in the form of manure and toxic runoff.

What is their aim in all of this? They say tougher state regulations on water quality, even though in the same breath, they admit that dairy farmers already face a herd of environmental rules.

"Of course, there are dairies that are putting a lot of money into complying with environmental laws. But they're an industry like any other. There are people who are going to get around rules if they can and in this case it is very harmful," said Carrie McNeil, director of a local chapter of Baykeeper.

The reaction of Michael Marsh, president of the Western United Dairymen, is not surprising. Dairy farmers, he said, know that dumping water or waste off their grounds can mean jail time and costly fines.

"It's already illegal for anybody to pollute surface or groundwater in the state of California," Marsh said. "Anybody that does needs to be prosecuted. That's our opinion. That is absolutely unacceptable."

Kennedy may not know that many dairy farmers already take steps to protect water quality through the California Dairy Quality Assurance Program, supported by Marsh's group and others. The program is a partnership between the state's dairy farmers, federal, state and regional regulatory agencies and UC Cooperative Extension.

One of its main missions is to help dairy farmers understand and meet strict regulations relating to manure, water quality and nutrient management. It has made and continues to make progress to promote high-quality dairy products with wise, effective environmental stewardship.

Activists, in this case and in so many other anti-agriculture campaigns, portray farms as "factories" and they pick their fights based on a "David and Goliath" model. "Big" is bad, "small" is good when it comes to farms.

Little recognition is given to the fact that families and individuals operate the vast majority of California farmers, including dairy farmers. Size is relative.

What constitutes a "mega-dairy?" The average California dairy farm is 825 cows. Size doesn't really matter if farmers abide by rules and take steps on their own to be good managers, not just of their herds, but of the environment too, as the California Dairy Quality Assurance Program demonstrates.

You have to wonder where all of this is headed if Kennedy's campaign gains any traction. In the past decade, environmental activists succeeded in whittling down California's timber industry with an onslaught of lawsuits and regulations to protect endangered species and the environment.

Today, California imports more lumber than it produces and the economies of dozens of rural communities have been desiccated by the loss of timber jobs.

With milk prices currently in the tank, urbanization hemming in farmers in the Central Valley, many counties adopting local ordinances to regulate dairies and the adoption of even more regulations in the offing, some dairy farmers would gladly pick up and move out of state. Many have.

The public and policy makers would be wise to ponder the facts and not be swayed by ill-conceived campaigns like this one that aim to portray dairy farmers as environmental villains.

If Kennedy and his followers want to help, they should get behind programs like the California Dairy Quality Assurance Program and other innovative and effective ways that farmers use to protect the environment.

The answer to environmental protection is not in heaping more regulation on the backs of California dairy farmers. They know how to protect the environment and given the chance, they certainly do.