

## **Kern's state legislators have a wish list for 2006**

### **Lawmakers aim to achieve more during 'wasted' first session of Legislature**

By VIC POLLARD, Californian Sacramento Bureau  
Bakersfield Californian, Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2006

SACRAMENTO -- Kern County's state legislators have a lot of leftovers on their plates, and we're not talking food.

As the Legislature reconvenes Wednesday for the the second year of its two-year session, many of the items on their to-do lists are left over from 2005.

The first year of the session has become notorious for what was not accomplished, as lawmakers and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger maneuvered for advantage in the Nov. 8 special election. "We wasted 2005," said the Senate's leader, Don Perata.

Kern County's representatives want to do everything from solving the state's stubborn budget crisis to helping Shafter develop a major international freight hub.

"The first thing we want to do is get out of the budget deficit," said Assemblyman Kevin McCarthy, R-Bakersfield.

While no one legislator can do that alone, McCarthy will be in a better position than most to influence budget deliberations. He is the Assembly Republican leader, and one of the Big 5 (party leaders in the Senate and Assembly plus the governor) who traditionally hash out the thorniest details on the budget and other matters.

The lingering budget deficit stems from permanent spending increases enacted by the Legislature and former Gov. Gray Davis that outstripped current state revenues.

Although revenues from a growing economy this year may produce a rainy-day reserve, a repeating "structural" budget deficit remains a concern for coming years when the economy is not so robust.

State Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, said he plans to continue pushing several bills that bogged down in the political swamp of 2005.

They include:

- Tightening requirements for dairies to use tax-exempt bonds to get low-interest loans for expansion. Florez has been waging war on dairies, charging that they use taxpayer-subsidized bonds to create more [air and water pollution](#).
- Barring counties from passing local laws to ban the use of genetically modified seeds, leaving rules up to the state.
- Barring or limiting Indian tribes from building casinos off their reservations in urban areas or along high-traffic freeways.
- Restricting the California Lottery's ability to join multistate or international lotteries like Mega Millions, and increasing schools' share of money from Mega Millions.

Florez said he also will continue his campaign to ban the importation of sewage sludge from urban areas into Kern County. Repulsed in his efforts to do that with a bill in 2005, he launched a signature drive that has qualified a proposed ban for the county ballot in June.

And he said he also plans to keep pressuring for changes in the handling of tobacco tax money for local children's programs and Medi-Cal funding for health care for the poor.

Assemblywoman Nicole Parra, D-Hanford, said she will continue pushing for ways the San Joaquin Valley can boost economic and job development.

"I'm looking for ways Central Valley communities can form partnerships regarding transportation and water issues and other things," she said, "although it's not real specific right now."

She said she will also push legislation to combat identity theft and strengthen protection against sex offenders.

Sen. Roy Ashburn, R-Bakersfield, said his unfinished business list is topped by a bill to require stiffer penalties for juveniles convicted of rape. The bill was prompted by the case of a Bakersfield girl who was raped by a teenager, who received what many considered a slap on the wrist. He said he also will continue to push for stricter requirements for background checks on child care providers. The office of Kern County Superintendent of Schools, which oversees child care programs, says background checks are so slow that some convicted criminals work for up to a year in publicly funded child care programs before their background checks come through and they are disqualified.

And Ashburn hopes to be involved in efforts to pass a compromise proposal to take the drawing of legislative district lines out of the hands of legislators.

Most lawmakers also have some new initiatives they will try to launch this year. Florez wants to help his hometown of Shafter, where his mother is the mayor, develop a rail and truck transportation hub that will handle imports from the Port of Oakland and ship valley farm exports back to Oakland.

McCarthy said he will try to make school construction less expensive by allowing schools to use existing architectural plans, rather than having to draw new ones for each school. Some of the lawmakers' work will be done largely out of public sight.

Schwarzenegger and legislative leaders expect to propose a major bond issue, at least \$25 billion, to build roads, water projects and other infrastructure facilities.

Local lawmakers will be expected to lobby behind the scenes for provisions to maximize the amount of that money coming to their districts.

## **Business interest up near Tallow**

**'You'll see a complete change,' says owner of nearby company**

By BEN van der MEER

Modesto Bee, Monday, Jan. 2, 2006

Since forming last summer, the Crows Landing Road of Stanislaus County Businesses United group has had one goal: Brightening the business outlook in the southeast Modesto neighborhood and commercial center.

Now, members of the group say one of the biggest obstacles to reaching that goal will soon disappear, with Modesto Tallow Co. announcing it'll end operations at its highly visible — and odoriferous — cattle rendering plant nearby.

"A lot of people with money don't want to come in and have a bad smell all day," said Robert Mendoza. His Mendoza Auto Sales dealership is across Crows Landing Road from Modesto Tallow's property, which encompasses about 40 acres.

"You'll see a complete change," he said.

After decades of odor complaints from neighbors, and political pressure from the city of Modesto and the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District, Modesto Tallow officials announced in December that the plant would close completely by the end of 2006.

Those living and working nearby welcomed that news, saying they were tired of the smell of dead animals wafting through the air.

But business owners and members of the Crows Landing group said the closure also will bring some long-term changes: more people coming to the area for shopping and services, and new businesses moving there.

Ron Baker of Baker Real Estate and Investments in Modesto said the tallow plant's closing almost is guaranteed to have a positive impact.

"No doubt, it was old, tired, kind of an eyesore, and then you have the odor," he said of Modesto Tallow, noting that the plant also is one of the first things one sees when entering the area from Highway 99.

But Modesto Tallow's property includes several undeveloped parcels close to Highway 99 and Crows Landing Road, and those could attract a lot of interest, Baker said.

A former owner of commercial real estate in that area, Baker said the stores cater to a heavily Spanish-speaking market. Businesses that could afford to relocate elsewhere usually passed on it, he said, though he didn't mention any specifically.

Tallow plant officials have not announced their plans for the site after it closes. The land it occupies may have to be rezoned by the city before any commercial development moves in. Already there are signs of interest in the three-mile business district. Though some predates Modesto Tallow's closure announcement, developer Don Agresti said a strip mall he's opening further south on Crows Landing Road is mostly spoken for.

"So far, it's working out pretty well," he said.

The stores planned for the center include hair salons, clothing stores and a tax preparer. If all 19 spaces in the center fill, Agresti said, he plans to develop another one nearby.

Business owners at Agresti's center said they're not close enough to the plant to notice it much but are happy it's closing.

"When it's very hot, it's very stinky," said Irma Camacho, who said she opened Irma's Fashions just before the plant's closure was announced but worked in the area for years. "I think now this is going to be a very good place to start a business."

Stanislaus County sheriff's deputy Noel Vento said he thinks so, too. He said chain franchises such as McDonald's and Starbucks may have more interest in the area now.

"What's really needed out there is a bank," said Vento, who works with district businesses and helped spur the Crows Landing business group's formation. "There is a lot of money, and the people have to either drive downtown or to the way north end of town to do something with it." Auto dealer Mendoza said he's confident enough in the changes to come that when the tallow plant closes, he's planning a financial donation to the Crows Landing Road business group for marketing efforts.

"I want to let people know this area is different," he said. "I want them to know this area's good for business."

## **Pacific Ethanol stock sale approved**

**Fresno-based firm plans five plants in California, including one in Madera.**

By E.J. Schultz / The Fresno Bee

Saturday, Dec. 31, 2005

Pacific Ethanol shareholders on Friday approved the sale of \$84 million of stock to Cascade Investment LLC, the personal investment vehicle of Microsoft founder Bill Gates.

The deal, announced in November, would give Cascade 5.25 million shares of convertible preferred stock, which if converted would give Cascade control of about 25% of Pacific Ethanol's common stock.

Terms stipulate that \$80 million of the \$84 million investment be used to build or buy ethanol plants.

Fresno-based Pacific Ethanol is planning five ethanol plants in California, including a plant under construction in Madera scheduled to be operational by the end of 2006.

"We're very excited to get this step accomplished," said Ryan Turner, chief operating officer of Pacific Ethanol, after the company's annual shareholder's meeting in Fresno.

The deal still requires regulatory approval. Terms also require the successful completion of debt financing for the Madera plant. Pacific Ethanol expects to use debt to finance about \$40 million of the estimated \$70 million plant, Turner said.

The company, he said, is "reviewing competing offers" from lenders.

The Cascade deal is expected to close in January, at which time Cascade will nominate two members to Pacific Ethanol's seven-member board of directors.

Pacific Ethanol stock fell 1 cent to close at \$10.82 in trading Friday on the Nasdaq Stock Market. The stock closed at \$10.10 on Nov. 15, the day the Cascade deal was announced.

Ethanol is a fuel additive mostly made from corn. Proponents say it makes for cleaner burning fuel and helps lessen the nation's reliance on foreign oil. In California, most gas must contain at least 5.7% ethanol.

Most ethanol is produced in the Midwest.

Pacific Ethanol and others are looking to bring large-scale production to California with plans to sell distillers grain, an ethanol byproduct, to the state's growing dairy industry. The grain can be used as feed.

The companies also see market opportunities under new energy laws that will nearly double the amount of ethanol used nationwide, from 4 billion gallons in 2006 to 7.5 billion in 2012.

The new law will effectively replace the 5.7% ethanol per-gallon mandate in California, allowing blenders to choose when and where to add ethanol.

On average, California blenders make gas with 6% ethanol, and most refiners have no plans to alter ethanol blends in the near term, according to a recent survey of refiners conducted by the California Energy Commission.

One factor that could influence refiners is the outcome of an ongoing review of the state's emissions model, the survey notes.

The state Air Resources Board in a 2004 study determined that ethanol-blended fuel burned in warmer weather can increase evaporative emissions that can contribute to smog. A new study on the effects of ethanol is under way, according to the energy commission survey.

Pacific Ethanol's five planned plants would pump out at least 200 million gallons of ethanol a year, officials say.

California's estimated demand for ethanol in 2005 is 900 million gallons, according to the energy commission.

## **New Year, New Opportunities**

### **Agriculture: Ray Souza, Dairy farmer west of Turlock**

Modesto Bee, Sunday, Jan. 1, 2006

Milk prices will be "softer" in the new year compared with 2005, he said.

The state sets a minimum price that dairy processors can pay to farmers, but it sometimes falls short of expenses.

Souza said costs are rising for feed, fertilizer and the concrete and pipes used in dairy construction. Dairy farmers also face new rules aimed at preventing air and water pollution.

"As we move forward and uncover better ways of dealing with the environment, these things come at a cost," Souza said.

Milk is No. 1 among farm products in the Northern San Joaquin Valley and statewide. Experts say almonds, which are second in the region, will continue to pay well in 2006 thanks to worldwide marketing efforts.

## **Emergency declaration is first step**

by John Wildermuth

S.F. Chronicle, Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2006

When Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger declared a state of emergency in seven Northern California counties Monday, he cleared the way for a variety of state and, possibly, federal aid to flow into the communities hit hard by the weekend storm.

The state declaration is part of a graduated response to what the law says are "conditions of disaster or extreme peril ... caused by such conditions as [air pollution](#), fire, flood, storm, epidemic, riot, sudden and severe energy shortage, plant or animal infestation or disease ..." or other problems local cities and counties can't cope with on their own.

Individual cities or counties have to declare a local emergency, with an initial damage assessment, and then have 10 days to request the state disaster proclamation, said Dale Chessey, a spokesman for the governor's Office of Emergency Services.

Once the governor declares an emergency, the state can help pay for local services, such as police overtime and sandbagging, and can restore and repair public buildings and facilities. That can mean clearing and repairing streets, roads and bridges, fixing public utilities and getting government buildings back in service.

If the governor determines the damage is too much for the state to deal with on its own, he has five days to request a federal emergency declaration, which can bring "essential" assistance for things like temporary housing and food distribution. Within 30 days, the governor can ask for a presidential declaration of a major disaster, which opens the door for the entire range of federal assistance to the state, individual cities and counties, and even individuals damaged by the disaster.

The governor also has to submit a detailed damage assessment to the Federal Emergency Management Agency before federal help can arrive, Chessey said.

Even without the disaster declarations, mutual aid assistance from the state and other counties is available to areas hit hard by the disaster, as are disaster loan programs run by the Small Business Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

### **And a year flashes before our eyes ... TOP NEWS STORIES OF THE PAST YEAR**

Bakersfield Californian, Saturday, Dec. 31, 2005

Kern County residents made a lot of news this year and *The Californian* tried to get it all down.

Possibly the biggest story of the year was the ongoing real estate market boom. Even when things slowed a bit in the last half of the year Bakersfield was still strong, coming in at No. 13 nationwide for housing appreciation.

Housing prices rose 27.1 percent here from the third quarter of 2004 to the same time this year, according to a report by the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight.

Some other stuff happened in 2005 and here's a sampling:

#### **JANUARY**

- Brian "Head" Welch, guitarist for Korn and Bakersfield native, finds God and ditches his rock star life.
- California Pizza Kitchen comes to Bakersfield. Opens at Stockdale Highway and Calloway Drive.
- Cal State Bakersfield's nursing program has 60 slots for more than 350 applicants.

#### **FEBRUARY**

- Garces High boys basketball team pulls off biggest upset in Central Section championship basketball history when it beats Fresno's San Joaquin Memorial 74-60.
- Logan's Roadhouse opens at California Avenue and Highway 99.
- Sam's Club opens on Gosford Road.
- Residents learn that Synagro Technologies plans to use a state-backed loan to set up a sewage processing plant 12 miles east of Taft capable of taking in 400,000 tons of Southern California human and dairy waste each year.

#### **MARCH**

- Flying J takes over the Shell refinery on Rosedale Highway.
- Valley High School, a Christian school open for a decade, suddenly announces its June closure.
- El Monte-based developer YK America International Inc. submits plans for a 450,000-square-foot shopping center on 45 acres near Delano.
- Chimpanzees at the Animal Haven Ranch in Havilah attack and severely injure St. James Davis who, with his wife, was visiting their pet chimp Moe. The two chimps who attacked are shot dead by the son of Animal Haven's owner.

#### **APRIL**

- An Alaska Aces hockey player is seriously injured during a playoff game with the Bakersfield Condors. Alaska fans say it was a cheap shot. The situation escalates into death threats

against the Condors, who have security escorts for the final game in Alaska. The Condors lose to the Aces.

- A development plan for the Kern River Bluffs area becomes mired in controversy after the developer, General Holdings, fences off land traditionally used by hikers, mountain bikers and runners.
- The National Audubon Society's 1,133-acre Kern River Preserve near Weldon doubles in size with the \$4.4 million purchase of the Sprague Ranch.

## MAY

- Dr. Horace Mitchell is installed as Cal State Bakersfield's fourth president.
- A jury deadlocks on the murder retrial of Bruce Sons, accused of murdering CHP Officer Richard Maxwell in 1994. The retrial came about after revelations that the prosecution hid key evidence about Maxwell's work history. A second retrial got under way in October, but again resulted in a hung jury. In December, a change of venue was granted and the case is tentatively moved to San Luis Obispo County. A third retrial date is pending.
- Cal State Bakersfield students vote to triple their activity fees, one step toward taking the school to Division I status.
- Bakersfield, the California State Parks Department and off-road enthusiasts announce a deal to purchase 11,000 acres near Round Mountain Road for an off-highway park.
- Buck Owens unveils several larger-than-life bronze statues of country music legends at an event at his Crystal Palace nightclub. Several performers show up, including Garth Brooks who asked longtime love Trisha Yearwood to marry him in front of delirious fans. She said yes.
- Highland High's boys tennis team wins its first Central Section championship since 1978, beating Fresno-Sunnyside 7-2.
- A 6,500-home development planned for 7th Standard Road, west of Jenkins Road is announced. It ultimately wins passage by the Bakersfield planning commission and City Council.
- Wm. Bolthouse Farms Inc. goes up for sale.
- Bakersfield is named the third most dangerous city for walkers in California.
- A new power plant at Tejon Ranch south of Bakersfield, known as Pastoria, owned by San Jose-based Calpine Corp. comes online. Once fully powered, it is expected to provide enough juice for nearly 600,000 homes. In late December Calpine, which filed for bankruptcy protection, asked a judge to nullify eight power contracts. A company spokesman said this will not impact Pastoria, though he would not say whether Calpine might sell the plant.
- Kern County supervisors vow to come up with an all-out sludge ban for the county. First they have to put together a massive environmental study that could take two years or more. Meanwhile, state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, was preparing a bill to allow Kern to ban sludge. Southern California sludge spreaders and haulers opposed the legislation so Florez tried to work out a compromise. That fell through and in June he vowed to put the ban on the June 2006 ballot. He needs 15,000 signatures.

## JUNE

- Mesa Marin racetrack, which opened in 1977, is sold to a housing developer by the Collins family. The final race at the track is held in October. Marion Collins announces in November that, along with Alan Destefani, he will build a new track near Interstate 5 and Enos Lane with a planned opening in 2007.

- Kern County 3rd District Supervisor [Barbara Patrick](#) announces her retirement, opening her seat for the June 2006 election. Bakersfield City Councilman Mike Maggard has thrown his hat in the ring.
- After five years away from coaching, Mark Hutson, Central Section all-time winningest coach, comes to Taft High to coach boys basketball.
- [Dairies come under new state rules to regulate air pollution. The rules go into effect July 1, 2008.](#)
- Radio advice show host Dr. Laura is bounced from Newsradio 970 KGET to make room for a local talk program hosted by Jack Duncan, who starts in July. In December, the station announces it's switching formats entirely to music from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Station 1560 KNZR picks up talk shows hosted by Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck from KGET.
- Bakersfield Condors hockey captain Paul Rosebush retires at 29 and goes to work for a local environmental company.
- Ivanhoe Energy Inc. discovers a new natural gas source 45 miles west of Bakersfield.

#### JULY

- Kern County makes out like a bandit when Congressman Bill Thomas, R-Bakersfield, gets \$722 million for local transportation projects folded into the massive Transportation Equity Act.
- Robinsons-May announces it will close its Valley Plaza store in 2006.
- A 34-year-old Bakersfield woman is Kern County's first confirmed human case of West Nile Virus this year. She did not need hospitalization.
- Kern County supervisors OK a "one junk vehicle" rule that prohibits homeowners from having multiple nonrunning vehicles visible from adjacent property.
- Tejon Ranch seeks approval for a 3,500-home resort called Tejon Mountain Village. Home prices are expected to start at \$500,000 to \$600,000 in today's dollars.
- Ramon Villatoro, 19, a Bakersfield resident, is killed in Iraq while serving in the Army. His widow, 19-year-old Amanda Villatoro, captures the community's heart with her poise and steadfast support of her late husband. She gives birth to Ramon Aristedes Villatoro III in November.

#### AUGUST

- The Elephant Bar Restaurant opens at Stockdale Highway and Calloway Drive.
- James Moore, 30, dies after a fight with Kern County sheriff's detention deputies in the Downtown Jail. The death is ruled a homicide, blunt force trauma to the head. Five deputies are arrested in December. Three are charged with murder and assault by a peace officer, two are charged with assault by a public officer. All five pleaded not guilty. A wrongful death claim against Kern County has been filed on behalf of Moore's family and names 15 jailers.
- The "You Don't Speak for Me, Cindy," tour stops in Bakersfield. The caravan is in response to Cindy Sheehan's vigil outside President Bush's ranch asking why her son had to die while serving in Iraq.
- The route of the South Beltway south of Bakersfield is OK'd by supervisors. It will connect Interstate 5 to Highway 58 east of Bakersfield at Comanche Drive.
- Four children are orphaned when their father kills their mother and then himself. A multinational custody battle then ensues, which threatened to separate the children. An order to hand over the two oldest to Mexican officials is blocked.

- Intense summer heat kills a second Kern County worker. A worker collapses in a tomato field and dies in July, then a furniture mover dies in August. New rules to protect workers get a promising hearing at the state Capitol.

## SEPTEMBER

- Popular southwest Bakersfield shopping center The Marketplace is sold by Castle & Cooke.
- Aging activists, workers and politicians commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Delano grape strike, which began the farm labor movement.
- Owners of the historic Padre Hotel in Downtown Bakersfield say they're back on track for renovations after a lengthy delay while asbestos issues were sorted out.
- [The number of Kern's "spare the air" days are down from 2004 for ozone. But during fog season, particulate matter shoots up.](#)
- A local musical act called Prussian Blue, made up of twins Lamb and Lynx Gaede, is pulled from the local lineup at the Kern County Fair. Songs by the twins have racist lyrics.
- Mark Abernathy, owner of a childhood home of President Bush in east Bakersfield, receives a permit to turn the home into a museum.
- Local truck driver Jose Hernandez becomes a millionaire on "The Big Spin."
- Bakersfield's second strip club, The Teaser Pleaser, is set to open and owner John Stevens, is planning a third club, Exotic Kitty on Sillect Avenue.
- City Council members argue over how to spend an expected windfall from the proposed sale of 1,200 acres of city sewer farmland. Some council members want to spend the money on roads and other infrastructure; others want to build a baseball stadium or some other amenity.
- Bakersfield is named the nation's tenth fastest growing metro area.
- Keith Brown takes over as Cal State Bakersfield's head basketball coach after Henry Clark resigns to become an executive and coach with the Harlem Globetrotters.

## OCTOBER

- The 21st and last Bakersfield Business Conference is held. Bill Bennett, in hot water after making what some believed were racist comments on his radio program, is one of the more controversial speakers at this year's conference.
- Two Kern County detention deputies, both sons of local veteran sheriff's officials, die in an alcohol-related crash on Rosedale Highway. The driver of one of the vehicles now faces two counts of murder.
- Joseph Wilson, famous nationally after his CIA-operative wife's name was leaked to reporters, speaks at the Kegley Institute of Ethics at Cal State Bakersfield.
- The Denny quintuplets turn 2.
- Sheriff Mack Wimbish violates jail policy by getting a friend and campaign contributor, suspected of drunken driving, out of jail early.
- Eight local people working for a Red Cross call center are arrested for fraud and accused of stealing \$25,000 meant for Hurricane Katrina victims.
- James Borba, who operates a 14,000-cow dairy near Interstate 5 southwest of Bakersfield, may sell several thousand acres to a home builder.

## NOVEMBER

- Dennis McCormick is sentenced to two years in Monterey County Jail for giving alcohol to his 17-year-old daughter before she drove into a Bakersfield family at Lake San Antonio, killing Jada Benge in 2004. The daughter, Dana McCormick, is serving seven years in the California Youth Authority.
- Taft High senior Ben Estill, a running back, is No. 3 in the state for yards and No. 2 for most rushing yards in a season in Kern County history.
- A *Californian* investigation shows more than a third of a former reporter's stories have evidence of plagiarism or fabricated sources.
- East High School administrators relent and allow journalism students to publish stories about being a gay teen. When administrators kept them from publishing last spring, the ACLU took the case to court. The lawsuit continues.
- The BC football team celebrates its 50th year at Memorial Stadium and advances to the playoffs with a 9-3 season. Quarterback Thomas Peregrin sets BC's single-season and career passing records for yards, touchdowns, attempts and completions. BC wins the first round, but loses the second round in the playoffs.

#### DECEMBER

- Three Kern County high schools win section championships in football -- Bakersfield High, West High and Burroughs High.
- A wounded Bakersfield soldier, Stephanie Browning, 20, returns home to Bakersfield after being injured in Iraq while training Iraqi police forces.
- The Fresno City Council rejects a proposal to truck 47,500 wet tons of sewage sludge a year to Kern County farmland.
- David Maher, a teacher at Centennial Elementary, returns home after spending 14 months running a helicopter maintenance crew with the Army National Guard in Tikrit, Iraq.
- Five sheriff's commanders settle an 18-month-long lawsuit with the county agreeing to pay a portion of the \$39,000 Kern County lawyers said they were improperly paid when Carl Sparks was sheriff. The suit between Sparks and the county continues.
- California Highway Patrol Officer Erick Manny of Bakersfield, 35, is killed Dec. 21 while chasing a speeding driver on Interstate 5 near the Grapevine.
- A 19-year-old from Bakersfield, Deondre Donte Marzette, is fatally shot inside Valley Plaza Dec. 27, wreaking havoc as droves of holiday shoppers fled the mall.

### **Era of Leaded Gas Comes to an End In Most of Africa**

Gains in Air Quality, Health Expected

By Craig Timberg - Washington Post Foreign Service

Sunday, January 1, 2006

JOHANNESBURG, Dec. 31 -- The import and refining of leaded gasoline ended throughout sub-Saharan Africa at the stroke of midnight Saturday as the region eliminated the biggest source of a toxic substance that has damaged brains, weakened nervous systems and fouled air and soil for 80 years.

It will take several months for the leaded gasoline in storage tanks to be consumed. But here in South Africa's largest city, tank trucks have already begun delivering a new grade of gasoline designed to protect older engines built for leaded gas.

"The old one, it will finish, maybe at 11," Thomas Mathabi, 21, a station attendant, said as he stood beside a pump containing some of the final reserves of leaded gasoline at a station in one of the city's plush northern suburbs. "It will be over."

As the last of the leaded fuel disappears, experts said, the air quality in Africa's increasingly dense cities should grow safer, especially for children.

The use of leaded fuel, which spews lead into the atmosphere and destroys emission control systems in vehicles, has caused Africa's relatively modest fleet of cars and trucks to create some of the world's worst urban air pollution. The lead in the air finds its way into children through contaminated soil and food.

"The moment you stop using leaded petrol, the lead levels in citizens start to drop," Rob de Jong, head of the U.N. clean-fuels program office in Nairobi, said in a telephone interview. "Six months from now, the blood lead levels in Africa should have dropped significantly."

Lead is among the most pervasive and damaging of environmental toxics, causing decreased intelligence in children even when exposure is at very low levels. First introduced as a fuel additive to curb engine-knocking in cars in the 1920s, it has been gradually eliminated from gasoline in much of the world in recent decades. Leaded gas was banned in the United States in 1996.

However, it is still found in 27 countries and on several Pacific islands, with the heaviest concentrations in the Middle East and Central Asia. Pressure is growing on the remaining countries that produce leaded gasoline, and supplies of lead additives for fuel refineries are slowly dwindling, said Colin McClelland, director of the South African Petroleum Industry Association.

"This change has to be made," McClelland said from Cape Town, where the association is based. "It's a dying product. It's like saying, 'Do we still want to have ox wagons here?' It's necessary progress."

The change, heavily publicized on South African television and radio in recent weeks, has caused some uncertainty. At many gas stations, attendants wearing yellow T-shirts that said, "Ask me about the right fuel for you," handed out brochures explaining the new choices in gasoline.

But motorists remained puzzled, and some drivers asked whether it was the new or old fuel in the pump before buying.

"I'm not sure if my engine needs to be upgraded" for the new gasoline, said Eric Duma, 36, who pulled up in his baby-blue 1986 Toyota pickup to buy just enough leaded gasoline to make the 30-minute drive to his home in Soweto. He expected to buy his first tank of gas without lead on Sunday. "I am worried," he said.

Leaded gasoline until recently amounted to nearly 60 percent of the South African market. Consumers accustomed to using that fuel will now need to choose between unleaded gasoline or a new variety called lead-replacement petrol, which has additives needed by some older cars to prevent engine damage. The price for leaded, unleaded and lead-replacement gas is the same because of government regulation.

Leaders in sub-Saharan Africa agreed in 2001 to phase out leaded gasoline by the end of 2005. In just the past month, 16 countries have stopped refining or importing leaded gas, according to the U.N. Environment Program. As recently as 2002, Sudan was the only country in the region that had eliminated unleaded fuel.

The health effects of ingesting lead, which also can be contained in paint and contaminated water, include increased risk for heart attack and stroke. Children exposed to high levels often display irritability, stunted growth and decreased intelligence measurements. Before Egypt eliminated leaded gasoline, the average child in one study there had lost 4.25 IQ points, according to the United Nations.

Vehicles are the largest source of lead hazards in the environment. Emissions testing in March found that the average car in Nairobi, for example, produced 16 times the harmful emissions produced by the average new car in the United States.

That same research found that 70 percent of automobiles in Nairobi initially had catalytic converters to break down carbon dioxide, hydrocarbons and other harmful emissions. But the systems were destroyed by leaded gasoline, which coats sensitive surfaces within the catalytic converters, rendering them useless.

"The most polluting fleet we've found anywhere in the world is in Nairobi," said James Lents, president of International Sustainable Systems Research Center in Diamond Bar, Calif., which did the study.

Lents, speaking from his home, said the situation is much the same in Africa's biggest cities, with broken emission control systems and high levels of air pollution.

In the move to eliminate leaded gasoline, the conversion of a refinery in Kenya to unleaded fuel in December was a milestone. So were the recent conversions of South Africa's six refineries, where \$1.6 billion was spent to eliminate lead and lower the levels of harmful sulfur in diesel fuel.

South Africa is the major supplier of fuel to much of southern Africa. As recently as 20 years ago, testing in South Africa revealed some of the highest concentrations of lead levels ever measured in children.

Unleaded gasoline was introduced as an option in 1996, and the next round of nationwide tests six years later showed reduced levels of lead in children's blood. Levels fell by more than half in Cape Town and by 25 percent in Johannesburg, said Angela Mathee, a lead policy expert for the South African Medical Research Council.

Yet the council estimates that at least 600,000 children in South Africa still have lead levels higher than the international standard of 10 micrograms per deciliter of blood. Mathee predicted that levels would drop with the next nationwide tests, likely in 2007.

Despite the confusion created by the change, motorists said Saturday that they were happy to switch fuels if it means cleaner, safer air.

"They should have done it long ago," said Malcolm Purdy, 45, a firefighter, as he filled the tank of his 1999 Ford pickup with leaded gasoline for the last time.

[Editorial, Merced Sun-Star, Jan. 3, 2006](#)

### **Our View: New rules will give the boot to soot**

Some advice for those in Merced who enjoy sitting before a roaring fire on winter nights: Enjoy it while you can. Proposed federal rules to reduce soot pollution are almost certain to force local air regulators to place some controls on fireplace use in the Merced region for the first time. While that may dim the warm glow of a fire on chilly nights for some, the rules represent good news for public health.

Critics complain that the proposed rules, while tougher than current standards, are not as protective of public health as they could or should be. There is evidence to support that. In issuing the proposed rules, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Stephen Johnson ignored the recommendations of his agency's own scientific advisory panel and EPA staffers who have called for stronger measures. The pollutants at issue are particularly nasty. Soot -- or fine particles, as the pollutants are known technically -- comprises microscopic bits of debris, smaller than the diameter of a human hair. The particles come from a range of sources, including dust, smoke and diesel exhaust.

Recent studies have shown that the smallest particles are the most dangerous. When airborne, they can be inhaled and then lodge deep in lungs. They can even enter the bloodstream, triggering heart attacks, asthma attacks and strokes. In people already suffering from respiratory ailments or heart disease, particle pollution can be deadly.

The EPA proposal will not change the annual allowable levels of fine particle pollution, as recommended by most health experts, but it does reduce the amounts of such pollutants that can be released daily.

The biggest sources of particle pollution in our region are fireplaces and wood-burning stoves. To meet the new federal standard, local air regulators may soon require residents with fireplaces to install EPA-certified low-polluting inserts and wood stoves.

On the worst days, when fog holds pollution close to the ground, the new rules may require banning fireplace use entirely. Similar fireplace rules are already in effect in the Sacramento Valley and Yolo and Solano counties.

The new rules will be a hardship for some, particularly poor people who use wood stoves to heat their homes. They also are likely to be unpopular.

But the tougher standards are necessary. As comforting as a crackling fire may be, protecting health and saving lives is surely a higher priority, no matter what the weather.

[Modesto Bee, Letters to the Editor, Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2006](#)

### **Vote to prevent uncontrolled growth**

It's official: the San Joaquin Valley is more economically depressed than Appalachia. Lower incomes, higher housing costs and less government spending here than anywhere else in the state. We can't even qualify for the crumbs.

Agriculture has been cleaning up its air act for 30 years. While Interstate 205 is widened from four to six lanes, more people will move here. That equals more air pollution. When was the last time you saw the snow-covered Sierra from here?

Developers continue to resist any orderly urban planning and fill campaign coffers of elected officials. Affordable housing here is only for those who have well-paying jobs elsewhere. And, to keep those developers developing, fees and taxes were either forgotten or lowered. Now, the infrastructure and services are stretched so thin as to be rendered almost invisible. How are the roads, police services and public assistance programs in your community today?

Don't get me wrong, growth can be good if it is properly managed. Populations always will continue to shift as the economics will allow. However, uncontrolled growth is like a cancer, choking the quality of life here. In the future, vote accordingly.

DAVID SCHNEIDER, Turlock

### **Find simpler solutions than burn ban**

It is almost impossible to believe that the air pollution control scientists can come up with such drastic solutions to mitigate the particles in our air. Don't they ever seek simpler solutions rather than the banning of all wood burning and putting people at the mercy of high natural gas bills and the loss of business for wood cutters and those who sell fireplace inserts and stoves?

Why don't these scientists suggest, even demand, that we all wear surgical masks on those particularly nasty days? We would rather put on the mask just as we would take our umbrella out on a rainy day. Healthwise, it is a far better solution. The downside is, however, that we might all look like robbers and, of course, we would be robbing the district of all their fines.

HARRY J. CROMPE, Modesto

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Tuesday, Jan. 3, 2006](#)

### **Trees make difference**

Charging builders a fee for sprawl is not by itself going to improve air quality. So I agree with Clovis Mayor Nathan Magsig who says the new tax gives "no guarantee of improved air quality." How right he is.

We are told the developers are encouraged "to build bike lanes" as well as "sidewalks" for the non-existent nearby jobs. What is missing from this plan (besides common sense) is the old-

fashioned "parking strip" -- that good piece of land between the asphalt road and the cement sidewalk.

In the winters, Some people will bike and walk on the sidewalks. But in our six months of summer heat, nobody in their right mind will walk on a sun- baked concrete cooker of a sidewalk.

But with the parking strip, there is room for shade trees. The bike lanes and sidewalks will be 10 to 20 degrees cooler with shade trees. Also, with tree- lined streets, cars can be parked on the asphalt road in the shade of the trees.

As the tree span enlarges, half of the road as well as bike lanes and sidewalks would be in the cool of the shaded street.

Besides being beautiful and cooling, trees given us oxygen and filter out some of the dust in the air. That improves the air quality. Ask the old- timers in town.

-- JAN GLEASON, Bakersfield

[Bakersfield Californian, Letter to the Editor, Monday, Jan. 2, 2006](#)

### **Rail use helps valley**

As San Joaquin and Sacramento valley populations and manufacturing (food processing, solar panels) increase, more people and freights will move up and down the valley and to the Los Angeles and Bay Area.

The Sierra Club would accomplish this with railroads rather than highways. Unless management and upkeep are exquisite, we will need four tracks, so there can be one passenger and one freight track going north and one pair going south. As rail use grows, trains can become longer and more frequent, rather than adding more costly freeway lanes that consume space and displace businesses. A train emits much less air pollution and global warming gas than the many cars or trucks it would take to carry what one train can.

Eliminating grade crossings saves lives and reduces emissions from traffic waiting at the crossing. If we spend a few hundred million dollars eliminating grade crossing and have proper rails, passenger trains can speed up to 105 miles per hour, rather than the 79 miles per hour they are now limited to.

The easier it is to go by train, the more people will go by train. Arriving in a valley town without one's car can make it hard to get around. In Bakersfield, much business can be done within walking distance of our Amtrak station.

We will probably also add high-speed passenger rail that competes with air travel between San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Sacramento. Trip times on high-speed passenger rail will be shorter if there are fewer stops in the valley.

-- ART UNGER, Bakersfield

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Sunday, Jan. 1, 2006](#)

### **Looking Ahead**

#### **Public needs to know about bad air, ER options**

**A permanent goodbye to the Modesto Tallow stench:** Regulators finally pressured this south Modesto plant into action — and the result is a shutdown, which was supposed to be fully complete by the end of December. Youngsters at Shackelford School will be able to use their playground without gagging; south Modestans can enjoy their back yards.

**Asthma alerts everywhere:** We hope every school in Stanislaus County will use the colored flags to alert students and families to dangerous pollution levels.

**ER education:** Hospitals and clinics need to better inform the public about when to go to the emergency room and when to try an urgent care clinic or even a doctor's office. Physicians should add evening and weekend office hours during the busy flu season.

**Clinical assessment:** Stanislaus County officials spent months analyzing options for its Health Services Agency. Once the changes are in place for a few months, the agency needs a thorough assessment of the cost savings for the county and the impact on poor people.

**Medicare modifications:** By midyear, it should be evident whether the new prescription drug plan is helping or hurting most seniors. Washington, D.C., resisted changes before Part D became effective; it should be responsive if dire patterns are apparent.

**Individual action — take a walk:** There are lots of appealing places, from Modesto's bike trails to the mall in the morning to the California State University, Stanislaus, campus.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Sunday, Jan. 1, 2006:](#)

### **Letter from an editor: Thank you**

By Russ Minick

We're starting this new year with something special: a tribute to the thousands of letter writers whose work was published in The Bee's Opinion pages in 2005. You'll find them listed on Page 3 and Page 4 of today's Vision section.

It's more than just a "thank you" for their contributions - though we are very grateful to the writers who make our letters pages so timely and lively. It's also a chance to talk a little about the function of letters, and the value we place on them.

Letters to the editor are a public forum for ideas, debate and even contention, at times. It's a print equivalent of the town square, a place where public policy questions, social issues and cultural trends can be discussed in a continuing and vigorous exchange between members of the community.

It is, in the vernacular of the Internet, a place where people can be interactive, and it has been that way since long before the creation of the World Wide Web.

Such public forums are also crucial to the function of a representative democracy. Sovereigns of any nation must be well-informed to make decisions that will allow those nations to survive and prosper, and in this nation, the sovereigns are the people.

There was plenty to write about in 2005: Iraq. Tax cuts. Water issues. Abortion. Pit bulls. Tsunami and hurricane victims. Downtown renewal. Air quality. Problems in the Fresno Unified School District. Social Security. Gasoline prices. A special election.

We had splendid pages of letters from veterans and others who remember V-E Day and V-J Day. This is the "greatest generation," now grandparents and great-grand-parents, and their letters reminded us of how much we owe them.

There were lots of letters. In the year just past, we received about 9,600, and we were able to publish about 3,600, almost 38%. Space is always at a premium; that's why we lowered the maximum word count on letters from 250 to 200 at the start of last year. There were grumbles about that - fewer now than at first - but it appears to have paid off. We were able to publish about 200 more letters in 2005 than in the year before.

The word count is one of the absolute requirements that must be met before letters will be considered for publication. Others are a signature, address and telephone number. Those requirements are both for confirmation of authorship and when questions arise about a letter as it moves through the editing process.

And there is editing. Clarity and concision are essential. Repeating an argument several times, for instance, does not bolster it. Instead, it usually slows the reader down and muddies the rhetorical waters. The Bee also insists - quaintly, perhaps, in this digital age - that rules of grammar, spelling and punctuation be observed. And letters written entirely in the upper case and littered

with multiple exclamation points - "I'M SHOCKED AND APPALLED!!!!!" - start with two strikes against them.

We're asked sometimes whether we still accept handwritten and typed letters. We do, and happily. It's true that an increasing majority of letters come to us by e-mail, and there are certain advantages to that. Such letters are already in The Bee's computer system, and do not require transcribing if they are chosen for publication.

But e-mail has its downsides, as well. Letters sent that way are less likely to be thoughtfully composed and self-edited. Too often they are stream-of-consciousness rambles that fly well past the 200-word limit before the writer even looks up from the keyboard.

E-mail is also the main mechanism for "astro turf" letters, the name by which fake grass-roots letters have come to be known in newspaper offices. The rise of Web sites has made it easy for people to simply copy the well-crafted efforts of professional public relations experts and then sign their own names to them. We see such letters all the time - sometimes word-for-word copies of one another, signed by several different area residents.

Such letters are only a small step up from plagiarism. We're much more interested in the genuine opinions of real people, and we try to keep a close eye out for the fakes. The National Conference of Editorial Writers aids this effort with a listserv, a sort of digital bulletin board on which editors from around the country post warnings and trade information on this and other issues.

Handwritten letters, on the other hand, are usually composed more thoughtfully. They are also more likely to have been written by older writers who - not to put too fine a point on it - went to school when students were still being taught how to spell and what all those punctuation marks are really for. We will always treasure those letters.

The best letters are those that address stories and columns in The Bee or in other letters. Local writers are every bit as perceptive as others when it comes to the analysis of international and national events. But very few of journalism's pundits focus their attention on the issues we face in Fresno and the Valley. Those issues literally hit locals where we live.

That's one reason we reserve our letters space for local writers. One exception: The Internet has made The Bee - like everything else - accessible anywhere in the world, and we've seen an increase in the number of expatriate Valley folks who keep in touch that way. Their perspectives from afar on local matters are often amusing or illuminating, or both.

It takes a lot of work - just look at how many letter writers we have - but we think the results are worth the effort. And we hope those letters keep coming.

[Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor, Sunday, Jan. 1, 2006](#)

### **Growing frustrated with growth**

It seems easy to dismiss many of the rantings against the Bay Area Transplants as nonsense; however, one senses that underneath such comments is a growing frustration with the decline in quality of life.

This has taken the form of a decrease in the amount of farmland, developments created with little forethought other than profit, an overabundance of strip malls and an increase in traffic and air pollution.

Instead of displaced anger toward individuals, our energies would be better spent electing smart-growth officials and making our voices heard at city council and planning commission meetings. There is a group of us concerned about a proposed development in Riverbank by Grupe Corp. We want to ensure any project considers long-term implications, and is seamlessly integrated into the environment and the existing community as much as possible.

KENT MITCHELL, Riverbank

[Modesto Bee, Editorial, Saturday, Dec. 31, 2005](#)

## **Grading 2005**

### **We're feeling better, but not about Medi-Care drug coverage**

**D** To the federal government for the anxiety and frustration it has caused seniors and the disabled who are trying to understand and sign up for Medicare Part D, the new prescription drug program.

**B** To Stanislaus County for the thorough process used in deciding how to reduce the flow of red ink from the Health Services Agency. It eliminated a few services and is consolidating clinic operations but did not make draconian cuts. Incomplete: It's too soon to measure the impact of health agency cutbacks — on residents or the county budget.

**A** To the hospitals and clinics with big expansions under way to better serve residents. Among them: Kaiser Permanente, Memorial Medical Center, Emanuel Medical Center, Oak Valley Hospital and Golden Valley Health Centers.

**D** For Stanislaus County's continued high rates of heart disease and diabetes, both linked to obesity. Stanislaus moved from last to second from the bottom among California's 58 counties for heart disease. We've got to do better.

**D** For the poor performance by Stanislaus County students on state physical fitness tests, suggesting youngsters are adopting the sedentary lifestyles of the adults.

**A** To the Stanislaus County Asthma Coalition and its partners for its flags alerting school children and others to bad air days. Fifty-seven of the county's 250 campuses have the colored flags.

**C** For the north valley's air quality, which was slightly better than in 2004, but still bad.

**B** To farmers and others in the ag industry who, despite their whining, have taken dramatic steps to reduce dust and other air pollution. They also have made a significant investment in research to identify the ag pollution.

**C** For the impact of West Nile disease. Stanislaus County had 90 reported cases, including one death; there were more deaths but fewer overall cases in San Joaquin County.

**C** For the slow and limited expansion of nursing programs at Modesto Junior College and California State University, Stanislaus. Hospitals have donated thousands of dollars to help these get going; they get an A.

**A** For effort to the public health officials, hospitals and others quietly involved in emergency preparedness. Their final grade — the true

[Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, Jan. 2, 2006:](#)

## **Falling short**

### **EPA's proposed new particulate pollution rules are far too weak.**

The rules had not changed in eight years, despite ever-mounting evidence of the deadly nature of the fine particles in our air.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency had a chance to take a bold step toward cleaner air, in the Valley and nationwide, when it announced proposed new rules for the regulation of particulate pollution. The agency boldly did as little as possible.

The EPA, with its typical courage, moved to revise the rules only after being sued by environmental and public health organizations. The rules had not changed in eight years, despite ever-mounting evidence of the deadly nature of the fine particles in our air.

A panel of scientists formed to advise EPA officials, as well as the agency's own staff, recommended much tighter controls.

Instead, the EPA will keep the current permissible limit for annual average concentrations at 15 micrograms per cubic meter of air. The limit on daily concentrations would be tightened from 65 micrograms to 35 micrograms.

The San Joaquin Valley is home to some of the highest levels of particulate pollution in the country. A state study said such pollution kills more than 1,100 people prematurely in the Valley each year. The death toll could be as high as 60,000 across the nation.

The particles in question are called PM2.5 (2.5 micrometers in diameter, less than one-thirtieth the width of a human hair) and the larger PM10. They are produced by diesel engines and wood-burning stoves and fireplaces, and also include dust and soot from other sources.

Particulates are the principal pollution problem in the winter months here in the Valley, exacerbated by weather patterns that often lock the dirty air in close to the ground. Stagnant air keeps the pollution hanging around to do its damage.

The tiny particles burrow deep into human lungs, and have been linked to asthma attacks, bronchial infections and other respiratory ailments. They are also blamed for lung cancer and heart disease in some people.

Some studies suggest that long-term exposure has a cumulative effect. Children and the elderly are particularly susceptible.

Given all this evidence, why would the EPA balk at tighter controls? Because industry lobbied heavily against that, and the Bush administration listened, as usual.

The tighter standards environmentalists and scientists pushed for, according to EPA's own analysis, would have reduced air pollution-related deaths in nine U.S. cities by 48%. By contrast, the weaker proposal would cut those deaths by 22%.

There may still be a chance to get more useful regulations. The EPA can revise the proposed new rules after obtaining public comments and holding hearings. Final regulations won't be issued until September. But it's an uphill battle.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Monday, Jan. 2, 2006:](#)

### **When is 'healthy'?**

If we are allowed to burn wood during the winter when the air quality is better than "unhealthy," when do we actually enjoy "healthy" air (other than when it rains)?

Ray Fagundes, Lemoore

[Fresno Bee editorial, Sunday, Jan. 1, 2006:](#)

### **Keep a clear view of the future we want**

#### **Fresno, Valley need a keen focus on progress.**

There is one thing we already know about the new year: Just as it was in 2005 and all the years in recent memory, Fresno and the Valley will have a full table of serious issues to confront. Our track record in dealing with those issues is spotty.

So, before we get to this short list of broad concerns for 2006, let's establish one overarching principle: We need to keep our focus and get things done.

**Jobs:** We've made marginal progress in improving employment, but we still don't have enough jobs, and too many of the ones we have don't pay enough to support a family in a decent measure of safety and comfort.

**Air quality:** There have been some small improvements, but we still have a long way to go before the Valley's air is clean. We still haven't made serious efforts to tackle the biggest part of the problem - the vehicles we love to drive.

**Water:** Issues of quantity and quality are growing each day. The boom in population is putting new stresses on an already tight supply. Agriculture's needs, as well as the growing demand for urban uses, are threatened by serious problems in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

**Schools:** Too few of the Valley's children are being prepared for the world they will inhabit as adults, either by getting them ready for college or by giving them vocational training in the skills that 21st-century jobs will require.

Transportation: We have a road and highway system that's crumbling, and we're not moving quickly enough to reduce the need for that system. We're well behind the curve when it comes to mass transit, and we'll need better roads for some time to come.

Quality of life: We don't have enough park space. We need more museums, more recreational facilities, more entertainment venues.

Governance: We need stronger regional perspectives - and solutions - to our problems. We need elected leaders who can see beyond the artificial lines that define their constituencies. We need realistic budgets with priorities that are the result of thoughtful debate instead of demagoguery and sound bites.

We have a chance to address some of these needs in the elections coming this year. We'll be electing people to represent us in Washington, D.C., and Sacramento, where many of the solutions to our problems must be found. We'll also be electing a host of city council members, county supervisors, school board members and others who will make decisions we will all have to live with for years.

It is crucial that we hold candidates to a high standard when it comes to judging them for these important jobs. We've been too content - or too apathetic - to do that for some time now, and it has cost us. Instead of leaders with vision and courage, too often we get hacks whose sole concern is raising money for and winning the next election.

The leaders we elect must have a clear vision of the future they wish Fresno and the Valley to have. They must further be able to communicate that vision to the rest of us. And above all, they must be willing to make hard decisions with an eye to a better future rather than easy choices that advance their next campaign.

The rest of us must be willing to accept it, from time to time, when such leaders tell us "no."

We cannot afford to do all the things we need, even if we got all the help we are owed from the state and federal governments. That means choices must be made, and sometimes that's terribly hard. Leaders must bear the burden of making those choices, and find ways to persuade all of us to share that burden.

Nor are we restricted to elected officials for leadership. Schools, churches, businesses, neighborhoods - all of them are full of people who have leadership skills to contribute. Fresno has a growing "creative community" that hasn't been tapped for its ideas and leadership nearly enough - though that is changing for the better.

Ask young people: What must we do to build a Fresno and a Valley that makes you want to stay here? And then listen hard to their answers.

Most of all, we must demand better. For too many people in Fresno and the Valley, the status quo means poverty, a poor education, a dead-end job, hopelessness, respiratory illness and an uninspiring civic landscape. The status quo is just not good enough. We deserve better. We can have it if we keep our focus, and start to get things done.

[Fresno Bee, Editorial, Saturday, Dec. 31, 2005](#)

### **Thumbs up**

Thumbs up to the city officials of Visalia for deciding that their city should be a much more bicycle-friendly community over the next few years. Visalia officials are preparing an update of the original 1993 bikeway plan that called for nearly 90 miles of bicycle paths, lanes and designated routes crisscrossing the city, including about 44 miles of paths along waterways such as the St. Johns River and Mill, Packwood and Cameron creeks. The plan will be presented to the Visalia City Council for approval in January. As the Valley attempts to address its air quality challenges, this is an important focus for every community, big and small.

[The Red Line, Madera Tribune, Dec. 27, 2005](#)

## Some thoughts over the holidays

With the holiday season, the number of calls to the Red Line were limited. All calls are edited for length and content.

The first message came from a gentleman who "wondered if people were as upset in this town as I am about the trash pickup." He lives in the "Granada-Westgate area" and said, "they were in such a hurry they dumped a quarter of it all the way down the street." He then added, "they leave the trash can a quarter full and I have to jam it in. The other day I saw them knock over a mailbox because they were in such a hurry." The caller said, "these guys need to do a better job because we're paying good money for city services."

A woman called after reading an article Monday, Dec. 19, about a holiday toy giveaway and said she "didn't want to sound like the Grinch that Stole Christmas." The caller "was wondering where were the other groups of people? I only see one group." Then added, "the one's that are receiving and the one's that are giving." She asked, "what about other children, white, black, other nationalities? Maybe they didn't need anything. Maybe they were out of town. It didn't seem very diverse to me."

A gentleman called in response to last week's caller who claimed Madera's JV girls soccer team won the Chowchilla tournament only because of weak competition. This week's caller said, "maybe the original caller was ignorant about the Madera JV girls soccer team that played, and won against extremely physical and quality varsity teams from Washington Union, Kingsburg and Coalinga (High Schools)." He added "division three and division four teams only apply to the school population and not the quality of play. All Madera," he added, "should be proud ... for winning the championship."

A woman left her name and said she "lived in the Madera Ranchos area." She lived "at least a half-mile from her neighbor and a mile from another who burn wood." She claimed, "because of the lack of wind and the air is "clean" people are burning wood and it causes me a great deal of pain." She was "very disgusted with the (San Joaquin) air pollution control district for not regulating wood burning to the level that is comfortable for people like me. It's like breathing second-hand smoke."

A lady left a message claiming, "I always read Mo's Musings first." She said Mr. Emo's column Wednesday (Dec. 21) dedicated to his gal, "brought happy tears to my eyes and then Friday (Dec. 23) he had me in the Christmas spirit by the second paragraph." She concluded, "Mo will be hard pressed to top those two columns."

A lady in the Christmas spirit said, "we just returned from touring the Christmas lights in town." She wanted everyone to know "they are beautiful. We want to thank all of you for the expense and hard work you've done to put them up for us. She wished all "a very merry Christmas."