

Air quality causes local arts council director to resign

By Susan Scaffidi, Contributing writer
Bakersfield Californian, Friday, Nov. 19, 2010

After nearly 10 years of promoting arts and culture in Kern County, Arts Council of Kern executive director Jeanette Richardson-Parks has announced her resignation.

Richardson-Parks said that over the next few weeks she will help current development director Laura Wolfe assume the post of interim director on Jan. 1. Richardson-Parks said her decision to leave is a "quality of life" decision.

"It's primarily because of the air quality in the valley," Richardson-Parks said.

"My husband, Woody, has had valley fever, he has scarred lungs, and I have asthma."

Richardson-Parks became executive director in 2001 after having worked as a consultant to nonprofit groups. Prior to that, she had served as the assistant director of the Bakersfield Museum of Art, the public affairs director at KERO-TV, and the executive director of Bakersfield's centennial celebration.

Richardson-Parks noted several recent projects as highlights to her tenure at the Arts Council, including the "Stop Graffiti Now" and "Stop the Violence Now" partnerships with the Bakersfield Police Department.

The projects sought to promote art as a means of expression to at-risk youth, resulting in two public murals and the decorated signal boxes downtown.

"We won a Beautiful Bakersfield Award," Richardson-Parks said. "That (project) was a huge high, a huge positive for me."

Richardson-Parks said other highlights included the promotion of public art, such as at the William M. Thomas Passenger Terminal at Meadows Field; the promotion of live music through the Irvine Foundation Grant project; and the assistance given to visual artists through several annual community-wide events.

Richardson-Parks also notes there are some challenges ahead.

"The recession, my goodness, the recession," Richardson-Parks said.

Richardson-Parks said although many arts organizations are hurting financially, and funding for school music programs is threatened, Kern County residents still want to support arts and culture in the community.

"The generous and giving spirit of the people of Kern County has been one of the highlights of my time here," Richardson-Parks said.

Richardson-Parks said she and her husband plan to take a year to travel and enjoy arts and culture, including some of their own making. She said they have not yet decided where they will eventually reside. Richardson-Parks said Wolfe will serve as interim director for six months -- until the end of the Arts Council's current fiscal year. At that point, Wolfe and the council board of directors will be able to decide whether to make the appointment permanent. Richardson-Parks said she feels confident about the council's future.

"I'm not the kind of person to walk away when something needs to be done," Richardson-Parks said. "The Arts Council is in great shape."

[Sacramento Bee Editorial, Sunday, November 21, 2010](#)

Editorial: Brown's appointees must address public health aspects of global warming

In Gov.-elect Jerry Brown's new administration, the California Department of Public Health has an opportunity and an obligation to help drive home the implications of climate change.

As outgoing Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has explained, global warming does not affect only penguins and polar bears. He points to air pollution-related implications on the health of Central Valley children who suffer from asthma.

There is a growing realization, led in part by California public health experts, that climate change is having significant implications, and could become worse as temperatures and sea levels rise.

The 2003 heat wave in Europe may have caused 70,000 excess deaths. California health authorities believe the 2006 heat wave in this state led to 650 excess deaths. Poor air quality, particularly in the Central Valley, remains a persistent problem.

As weather patterns change, mosquito-spread diseases like West Nile virus could become more of a problem. Waterborne diseases such as cholera thrive in warmer conditions, as do bacteria like E. coli that foul the food supply.

As it happens, many of the solutions to climate change are good for our collective health. Any new developments ought to be bike and pedestrian friendly, encouraging people to drive less and walk and pedal more.

A recent report by the Oakland-based nonprofit organization Public Health Law & Policy opens with these words: "Climate change may well be the greatest threat to human health in this century." It proceeds with a call for the California Department of Public Health to become more directly involved in California's response to climate change.

Public health experts are among the state scientists working to implement Assembly Bill 32, the 2006 law that seeks to reduce greenhouse gases. If anything, they must take a more prominent role in explaining the significance of climate change.

During Brown's first gubernatorial administration, the state made advances in the area of public health. This time, the officials he appoints must address the real and future implications of climate change.

[Bakersfield Californian, Commentary, Sunday, Nov. 21, 2010:](#)

Embracing this planning ideal nails two goals

By Robert Price, Californian Columnist

As a group, hard-core bicyclists have a subversive reputation. With good reason, too. Many of them have, as much as possible, moved away from that most common of cultural reference points, the automobile. They lurk on the fringe, and people on the fringe worry us. Especially if they're wearing spandex leotards.

But life here in the American mainstream keeps leading us to some of the same conclusions those cycling subversives have long been pointing to.

Namely, that we'd all be a lot better off if we followed their lead.

Two recent events tell elements of the story: On Oct. 19, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District board voted to pass along a \$29 million bad-air fine to valley residents by way of a \$12 car-registration surcharge. Our air is getting better, but not fast enough for the federal EPA.

Then, on Nov. 16, the Kern County Department of Public Health hosted a day-long symposium to call attention to the worst public health crisis in our history: an epidemic of heart disease, diabetes and obesity. We're ranked 58th out of 58 California counties in heart disease -- meaning worst -- and we're 57th in diabetes deaths. Sixty percent of our population is overweight or obese.

In between those alarming status updates, on Oct. 28, the Fresno City Council took a noteworthy step toward addressing the health of its own citizens, approving a Bicycle, Pedestrian & Trails Master Plan that will expand that city's existing 137 miles of bicycle paths, lanes and routes into a 900-mile transportation network.

The quality-of-life implications of reconfiguring the transportation grid of a city in such a way that it becomes possible to commute on a bicycle relatively free of danger, worry and inconvenience ought to be evident.

It's the potential to fight obesity and bad air that should have the Bakersfield City Council wondering how to hasten the arrival of a bicycle city. And I don't mean a bicycle-friendly city, which suggests that we've merely ceased to be bicycle-hostile. I mean a city that gives reasonable weight to bicycle (and pedestrian) infrastructure, so that motorists aren't unduly aggravated by the competition for road space. Done right, many might actually be compelled to switch teams.

But that represents a big, daunting, expensive, uncomfortable culture change. And we don't do change well around here.

"This needs to be a political decision," said Bob Smith, the civil engineer who founded the nonprofit organization Bike Bakersfield a decade ago. "The city staff, the engineers, are going to keep doing things the way we've always done them unless somebody tells them otherwise. And the way we've always done it is not successful because of these obesity rates and our air pollution issues. Hey, we've got to do something different."

Quietly, cities all over the country are doing just that -- they're embracing community-planning principles known as "complete streets" that factor in bicycles and pedestrians in a meaningful way.

Complete streets standards have been adopted in every corner of the U.S., from Scottsdale, Ariz., to Roanoke, Va., and from Edmond, Okla., to Spokane, Wash. In 2008, 25 cities adopted compatible policies, according to the National Complete Streets Coalition. In 2009, about 50 did so, and, with six weeks left in 2010, another 60 cities have adopted the principles. The city of Los Angeles is likely to adopt complete streets standards next month.

L.A. planners are working with various bicycling communities to create robust bicycle boulevards, as opposed to simple "bike-friendly streets." They're talking about more prominent signage, bright asphalt markings known as sharrows, special intersection treatments and assorted traffic calming devices.

Fresno's plan, which will take decades to fully implement, doesn't merely widen bike lanes, create bicycle-only routes and add signage and sharrows -- it will include bicycle racks and lockers throughout the city, according to city engineer Bryan Jones. The price tag is \$1.3 billion, but much of that expense represents the construction costs of new roads. A portion of the cost would be borne by developers as they construct homes and develop infrastructure for the city's growing population.

State and federal transportation grants are out there, enough for any city to get things rolling -- but the will must exist and local governments must fully sign on.

This is the perfect time to talk about it here. Bakersfield is in the midst of a General Plan update, and some of these bike-mobility issues are already on the table.

"The evidence now is if you build good facilities, people will ride," said Smith, who would like to see canal banks incorporated into a cycling infrastructure plan. "Plenty of communities are putting those principles to work. Politically we in Bakersfield are a little slower to catch on, but that can change if enough people want it to."

Or, perhaps we've decided we can just put up with off-the-charts smog and obesity. Dealing with that stuff is hard, but change is harder.