

Golden West graduate targets clean air

By Shannon Darling
Schools

[Visalia Times-Delta, Monday, Aug. 30, 2004](#)

Fighting air pollution is something we all have to think about, according to Golden West High School graduate Drew Waters.

"If we all do our share to reduce air pollution, the benefits will be tremendous," he said.

Waters, 17, recently wrote his thoughts down in a four-page, award-winning essay titled "How Can We Combat Air Pollution?"

The essay won Waters a \$1,000 scholarship from Southern California Gas Co.

The cash is something Waters really needed. He will start classes today as a freshman at Southern Utah University.

"I've already applied it to my tuition," Waters said via phone from his dorm room.

Judges of the competition said Waters' four-pronged approach to battling polluted air was a good one.

Waters' essay highlights a plan to clean air with education, at-home strategies, changes in driving and work habits, and support by local and state government.

For example, Waters said in his essay, "If consumers set their air conditioners 6 degrees higher, it will save 190,000 barrels of oil a day and eliminate all those pollutants that come from burning oil to produce the electricity involved."

Waters also pointed out that accelerating gradually and using cruise control on the highway will also cut down on pollution.

"We just have to work together," Waters said. "Clean air isn't impossible."

Dairies bask in rejection of freeze

Issues expected to keep swirling after board voted to allow nine new projects to move near Wasco

By GRETCHEN WENNER, Californian staff writer
[Bakersfield Californian, Monday, Aug. 30, 2004](#)

Dairies are coming to Kern County. That much is for sure.

What's not so clear is this: Who won last Tuesday when supervisors voted down a temporary freeze on new dairies?

Dairy proponents say the county is greenlighting new jobs and facilities that will perk up the local economy.

Skeptics say supervisors buckled to a messy industry that dirties air and water and will drive up costs for all business here.

Already, Kern County is home to an estimated 290,000 milk cows on 55 dairies.

An additional two dozen projects with more than 214,000 animals are waiting in the wings.

Supervisors Tuesday agreed to let the first nine new projects move ahead.

All nine, with a total 76,000 cows, will settle near Wasco.

Extremes

"Unfortunately, in Kern County, dairy is the new guy on the block," said J.P. Cativiela, a dairy industry spokesman, adding there'll be "an extra measure of NIMBY-ism going on for a while."

The most contentious issues concerning dairies are environmental.

On one side are those who say the Central Valley's milk cows -- in a few years -- will create more air pollution than cars.

Some dairymen, by contrast, say cows and dairies cause no pollution at all. They believe dairies are beneficial to air quality because plants grown to feed cows gobble up bad dairy air and then some.

Science falls somewhere in the middle.

"There is certainly an air pollution impact," said Frank Mitloehner, who is studying dairy emissions at UC Davis. "How much, we don't know."

But if you feed an animal protein, he said, it excretes nitrogen, and some of that will become airborne in the form of ammonia, a pollutant.

"There's no doubt about it -- it's 100 percent sure," Mitloehner said. "So people can say what they want, but it's just a fact of life."

Mitloehner set up a "bovine bubble" experiment that should produce its first reliable emissions numbers in about six months.

Mitloehner believes dairy emissions will likely turn out lower than some current guesses, which are based on 1930s data.

Still, Kern County would feel 214,000 new cows.

"Those are significant numbers," he said. "That's a lot."

Fresno State's Charles Krauter, who is studying emissions from manure lagoons on dairies, agrees numbers are likely to change.

Krauter, who will have solid results by January, says his preliminary data indicates new figures won't turn out to be a "huge change" -- in other words, not 100 times more or less than what's now estimated.

But emissions could easily be half or twice as much as now believed, he said, or even one-tenth to 10 times current levels.

Fines, fees, fum

Whatever the air pollution impact turns out to be, it'll be bad news for valley air.

The basin is already so polluted it's got the worst air in the nation, by some measures.

That means health issues for some with asthma, bronchitis and other respiratory problems.

Then there's the financial aspect.

If air here isn't scrubbed up enough to meet federal standards by 2010, the valley stands to lose \$2 billion in federal highway funds.

In addition, existing businesses will pay more to operate here, according to Dave Warner, permit manager for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

That's because the air district, which has the job of cleaning up the valley's air, will have to clamp tighter to eke out air quality gains when tons more pollutants are released skyward.

Bakeries, gas stations, manufacturers, dry cleaners, oil refineries and other businesses permitted by the district will likely need expensive pollution-reducing equipment because of new dairies coming here, Warner said.

Another issue is groundwater.

Lonnie Wass, engineer with the state Regional Water Quality Control Board, said dairies definitely pose a threat to water supplies: Nitrogen and salt from manure and urine can leach into groundwater.

In the Chino basin, a former dairy hotspot transformed by urban encroachment, groundwater pollution is so serious regulators intercept and treat groundwater supplies before they reach a river there, Wass said, in order to prevent the river from getting polluted.

One cow creates 17 pounds of manure, in dry weight, every day, according to a recent UC study for the water board. That's a pound of nitrogen and two pounds of salt each day per animal.

In a year, 100,000 cows pump out about 320,000 tons of manure, 19,000 tons of nitrogen and 39,000 tons of salt.

The groundwater around Wasco, where the first knot of new dairies will bring 76,000 cows, is already degraded, Wass said.

To prevent salt and nitrogen from leaching into the groundwater, Wass said, 76,000 cows would need about 19,000 acres, or 30 square miles, of crop land to spread nutrients from cow manure.

Taxes and such

Economic benefits from dairies, proponents say, include beefing up property tax rolls.

In Kern, the figures aren't particularly impressive.

In 2004, dairy properties in Kern totaled about \$248 million in assessed valuation. Some 85 parcels are currently on the rolls, according to county assessor Jim Fitch.

That valuation nets about \$2.5 million in taxes.

Most of that money goes to the state, leaving the county with \$719,000 in taxes from dairies.

By comparison, the county pockets about \$32 million in property taxes from oil and gas land.

What's more, Fitch points out, many dairy properties have taxes reduced through the Williamson Act.

Farmers, including dairymen, who enroll land in the program pay lower property taxes by agreeing not to develop acreage for 20 years or so.

Farm ground here typically sells for \$5,000 to \$6,000 an acre, Fitch said. (Residential property is going for up to \$80,000 an acre, he added.)

But if enrolled in the Williamson Act, it's assessed at a considerably lower value -- one difficult to pinpoint because it's based on would-be sales of commodities like alfalfa, Fitch said.

But if dairies might not drum up major property taxes, at least one appraiser doesn't think they'll lower home values anytime soon.

Gary Crabtree of Affiliated Appraisers sees "no negative impact for some time" because dairies are so far out from urban areas.

"Especially if they're downwind," Crabtree said. "Upwind -- that's another matter."

Local broker Louie Gregorio said some clients have asked where all the dairies are going, but none have called off plans to move to Bakersfield because of them.

Broker Louise Juracek, who grew up on a dairy farm, said folks in the local real estate industry haven't yet figured out what's to come.

"People haven't understood the reality of that many cows," she said.

When they do, she said, it will be too late: the cows will be here.

"It will impact us," she said. "It's not a good tradeoff compared to what we're losing."

First city

Larry Pennell, Wasco's city manager, said the town got "half a loaf" with the decision Tuesday.

"I think the board of supervisors have placed a higher priority on dairy cows than they have on people," Pennell said Friday.

The city 25 miles north of Bakersfield is known for growing roses.

Now it's got a cow cluster on the way.

City leaders found out in June that 10 or so dairies were headed to land northwest of city limits.

They're not happy about it, in part because of recent plans to transform a troubled golf course at the northwest corner of town into an upscale residential development with 2,000 or so homes.

"Obviously it's a conflict," Pennell said of the proximity of new dairies to the golf course.

So, who won last Tuesday?

The answer, of course, depends on who you ask.

"The dairy industry and lobbyists are all winners," said state Sen. Dean Florez, the Shafter Democrat who held a July hearing on the issue in Wasco.

The industry isn't gloating, however, at least not in public.

"We're optimistic it appears the Board of Supervisors has at last taken the position they want jobs in Kern County," said Michael Marsh of Western United Dairymen.

Luke Cole, the lawyer whose Center on Race, Poverty and the Environment halted the valley's dairy industry for several years with environmental lawsuits, has another answer.

"There is a clear loser: the residents of Kern County," Cole said. "They're going to be breathing dairy air for their lifetimes."

The prospect of a temporary dairy moratorium might not be completely dead.

Michael Rubio, the supervisor-elect who'll take Pete Parra's seat in January, said he would have voted for the temporary freeze.

"I do not want Kern County to be another Chino valley," said Rubio, currently a Florez aide. "I hope come January we can take this issue back up for a vote."

Looking for entry-level home, condo? Good luck

Bakersfield residents priced out of market looking for housing alternatives and running into a brick wall

By MATT WEISER, Californian staff writer
[Bakersfield Californian, Sunday, Aug. 29, 2004](#)

Two words sum up the new reality of Bakersfield's hot housing market for Jason and Stephanie Sanders.

"Sale pending."

The couple have been searching for a new home since January. The mobile home they own on South Chester Avenue has become too small for their two young children and two dogs. The children share a bedroom now, and they need a back yard to play in.

But Stephanie, a church secretary, and Jason, a mechanic, couldn't escape those two words. Every time they found a home that interested them, it had already gone to someone else.

"I get my hopes up, and then it doesn't happen. It's just been like a big roller coaster," said Stephanie, 26. "It can be very frustrating."

In short, the unthinkable has happened. Bakersfield residents have been priced out of their own affordable housing market. Where once working-class people could still grab that American dream, now transplants and out-of-town investors with deep pockets are driving up home prices.

Buyers willing to lower their expectations -- start with a condo or smaller home -- will find little relief. This city, addicted to sprawl and cheap land to meet its housing needs, is responding slowly to the need for housing alternatives. A growing market for condominiums, townhomes and small-lot subdivisions remains largely untapped.

"The condo market is really good here. There is a shortage of them," said Greg Harvey, chair of the Bakersfield Association of Realtors government relations committee. "It would be great if a builder came in here and built good-quality stuff that was attractive to younger buyers or the newer buyer. Quality entry-level housing is really tough to come by."

Filling in the blanks

Developing smaller homes would offer a host of benefits for the area -- especially if those homes are built as infill near the city center, which can reduce traffic and [smog](#) as well as conserve land.

"Definitely we need more diversity in our housing," said Pauline Larwood, executive director of the Smart Growth Coalition of Kern County. "It's incumbent upon local government to do that for other reasons, sound financial reasons, for instance. The more spread out we are, the more it costs government to provide services."

Driving through central Bakersfield a casual observer can see dozens, perhaps hundreds of vacant or underused parcels that could be available for this sort of housing.

City and county planners say they have never attempted to inventory that land in an effort to interest developers.

There are incentives to encourage infill development, some of them powerful. But the city and county are not yet tapping one of the most powerful: actively rezoning land for higher density.

Bakersfield Planning Director Stanley Grady said it is not the city's role to push builders to create more high-density housing, such as condominiums. Developers should drive that, based on consumer demand.

"The market determines if there's a demand for them (smaller homes) or not," Grady said. "The zoning is there. There's still plenty of vacant land available. What we need are more products built."

But some builders say the problem is just the opposite. They say more land is needed for higher-density development, and they need the city's support to rezone that land.

"Building them is the easy part. The problem is land that's approved for this kind of construction (higher density). That's really where the shortage is," said Jeff Williams, a Bakersfield home builder for 20 years. "It would take a lot of political will to change that, and I don't know that that exists right now. The unfortunate side is that things would have to get so bad traffic-wise or pollution-wise before people would accept that."

Williams has found a market for four-plex homes, mainly in the northwest. They sell for \$450,000 and up, mostly to out-of-town investors who rent out all four units. So far, none have been owner-occupied.

Priced out

Somewhere in the last three months, it seems, Bakersfield ran out of affordable housing. The once generous supply of homes priced around \$100,000, long available to generations of local working people, suddenly climbed out of reach into the \$150,000-plus range.

The increased competition in that range pushed prices up further and created bidding wars. For Bakersfield homeowners, it is a dream come true. For buyers, a nightmare.

The median price of a single-family home in Bakersfield reached \$183,500 in June, a 28 percent increase over the prior year, according to the California Association of Realtors.

"Our first-time homebuyer market that was so wonderful here is pretty much gone for your lower-income, lower-middle-class resident," said Louise Juracek, a Bakersfield real estate agent.

"There's a whole bunch of people who cannot afford to buy a house anymore."

By a wide margin, Bakersfield is still one of the most affordable home markets in expensive California. The statewide median home price set a new record in June at \$469,000, about 2.5 times more than the Bakersfield median, according to the California Association of Realtors. This

makes Bakersfield attractive to retirees, Los Angeles transplants, and investors looking for affordable income property.

But working-class Bakersfield families who want to own a home may have to adopt strategies that have been standard elsewhere for years. In Los Angeles and the Bay Area, many first-time buyers build equity by owning a condo or town house, or settling for a smaller home at first.

"The American dream just doesn't mean regular homes. It can mean condos, too," said City Councilman Mark Salvaggio. Still, he said, the real estate market should decide what gets built, not government. "If a developer comes forward and wants that, we should encourage them and work with them."

Building smaller

Some Bakersfield residents have already discovered the benefits of condo living, pushing prices of existing condos up faster than single-family homes. In June, the median price of a Bakersfield condo was \$120,000, up 50 percent from the same month last year, according to the California Association of Realtors.

"There was a time a few years ago when you could hardly give them away," said Jim Knapp, an agent with Watson Realty. "Now, the minute they come on the market, they're gone."

Dan and Suzanne Gray aren't selling theirs. They bought a condo at The Shores on Gosford Road 11 years ago, after their children grew up and moved out. Proximity to shopping and the low-maintenance amenities at The Shores made them condo converts.

"It's unique," said Mr. Gray, a "50-ish" oil equipment salesman. "It's built around a lake, so we have ducks and fish and squirrels and birds and all kinds of wildlife in our back yard. People that we've had over to our house are shocked that there's even a place like this in Bakersfield. It's almost like living in a resort, I guess."

Construction of multifamily housing, which includes condos as well as apartments, dropped dramatically from a peak in the mid-'80s, both in Bakersfield and statewide, according to the Building Industry Association. While construction has recovered somewhat statewide, it has languished in Bakersfield, with just 319 units built last year. That's just 10 percent of 1984 levels, and a pittance compared to the 6,410 single-family homes built last year.

But some say the multifamily market is poised for recovery in Bakersfield. Jerry and Beatrice Higdon provide some proof.

Out of the zone

Last year, the Higdons bought a home in the new Bellagio subdivision, built by Kyle Carter Homes near Centennial High School. Though not technically condos, they share many of the same attributes, including small lots, narrow streets, a community swimming pool and a homeowners' association that handles most maintenance.

Built in a Tuscan style, the homes are grouped in fours, sharing landscaped courtyards with fountains and decorative tile. The smallest units, at 1,700 square feet, sold for \$163,000 a year ago.

"It was a good move for us," said Jerry Higdon, 60, a semi-retired investment counselor. "I'm surprised there's not more of them in Bakersfield. Some of these other builders should catch on."

The Higdons had planned to build a home with a pool in the upscale Seven Oaks development. They even picked out a floor plan. Then they found the Bellagio neighborhood, and the joys of landscaping and a pool that someone else maintains.

Builder Kyle Carter originally planned 265 Bellagio-style homes in four phases. But demand was soft at first, so he scaled that back to the 59 homes in the first phase. Then interest exploded, and those 59 sold "practically overnight," he said.

"I think there's a market for condos right now," said Carter, who initially planned to live at Bellagio himself. "I would have never thought a 1,200-square-foot home would sell for \$200,000 here (in Bakersfield), and it is. I think things are changing."

Though some builders disagree, city and county officials say there is enough land zoned for small-lot housing and condominiums. In metro Bakersfield, there are 750 acres zoned for this purpose in the 2002 general plan, compared to some 12,000 acres zoned for single-family homes.

"I am a strong advocate for smaller-lot developments," said Kern County Supervisor Ray Watson. "I have encouraged it, but I don't think it's the county's place to demand it. Again, if the builders see a market out there for people who want smaller lots or condos, they're going to build them."

Downshifting

Other builders see the potential, and plan to start offering more condos, townhomes and small-lot subdivisions. It will give city and county officials a chance to test their commitment to housing variety.

Castle & Cooke California Inc. is in the final-draft stage of a major new planned community near Seven Oaks. The developer owns four square miles of land west of Buena Vista Road. President Bruce Freeman said the still-unnamed community will be built around a "European-style village" of commercial and retail development, ringed by apartments, condos, townhomes, and then full-size luxury homes.

The entire community, he said, will be linked by a network of upscale parks, lakes, trails, landscaping and other amenities.

"People will buy the higher-density, attached product if you create a nicer environment for it," said Freeman. "For people starting out, that's going to be the market. That's the future. We plan a lot of them -- all different shapes and sizes, with real strong architecture."

Freeman said condos and townhomes could comprise up to 20 percent of the project. He hopes to present the plan to city officials within 60 days, with the first housing units available by 2007.

The market is also recharging the long-stalled retail development once called Grand Canal, a Venice-themed retail project along the east side of Highway 99, south of Panama Lane. Fresno developer Paul Owhadi said he now plans to add condominiums to the project.

Owhadi said the project, most recently called Gateway, could include as many as 300 condos facing H Street, with retail development facing Highway 99. He hopes to start construction in a year.

"Bakersfield really doesn't have a lot of condos," he said. "But the market has changed so dramatically, I thought it would be proper to get into the condo business in Bakersfield. It's not only prices, it's just the style of living."

Many retiring baby-boomers don't want the upkeep associated with the typical single-family home. They're gladly "downshifting" to smaller homes and condos, which allow more free time for travel and recreation.

Simultaneously, the same holds true for their children, many of whom put off parenthood and lead more active, social lives. These "echo boomers" prefer fuss-free living near shopping and entertainment.

City living

The city of Bakersfield redevelopment agency is hoping to tap both markets for people of modest means with its Mill Creek project, a plan to beautify the Kern Island Canal running south from Central Park.

The agency is subsidizing a 180-unit senior apartment project now under construction downtown, south of California Avenue near the canal. It also hopes to lure a 17-screen movie theater to the area, with up to 200 more family apartments clustered around it.

It is hoped these new residents will bring disposable income downtown to kick off an urban revival. Many are also likely to walk or bike to downtown jobs, reducing traffic congestion and air pollution. The homes will also be walking distance to downtown restaurants, Centennial Garden, and the new McMurtrey skating and swimming center.

"The missing little component in this whole thing is condos," said Donna Kunz, Bakersfield economic development director. "We are looking for compatible sites and quality developers to do condominiums in that same vicinity."

Construction recently started on another city-subsidized project, Parkview Cottages. It will include 74 single-family homes on small lots next to Central Park. The redevelopment agency provided the land to the developer, Petrini Construction, for \$1, and is also subsidizing mortgages so they'll be affordable to moderate-income buyers, such as teachers, police officers and young families.

Kunz said the first model homes should be open just after Christmas. Prices will range from \$130,000 to \$200,000.

"I think there's a huge market for the cottage or patio homes, or other urban-lot homes," said Kunz. "In Bakersfield we have some beautiful homes on large lots, and we've been spoiled for a long time. But the valley is finally catching up to the rest of California. Land is becoming the premium. So you're going to start seeing more neighborhoods on small lots with smaller homes."

Infill incentives

Marvin Dean has confronted this truth. Four years ago, he started building new homes on vacant lots in some of the most neglected neighborhoods of east Bakersfield, near Martin Luther King Jr. Park. Back then, he could buy vacant or blighted residential lots for \$3,000. Today, he said, similar empty lots go for \$25,000.

"We're beyond success in the sense that we should have secured all the property when we started," he said.

Dean and other members of his family helped kick-start the new housing market in the area. Today, he knows of 10 other builders working in the area, and those vacant urban lots are filling up with new homes as nice as anything else in town.

City planner Jim Eggert said he has processed permits for about 40 new housing units in the area since the beginning of this year. Some are for multiplex homes. For such infill construction, the builder gets credit for the home that once existed on the property, resulting in lower permit costs.

New this year, the city also charges a cheaper road impact fee on homes built in a designated "core area," while homes built on the edge of the city pay more. City leaders hope this discourages sprawl, and encourages investment in older areas of town.

So far, it appears to be working, saving builders thousands on every new home. If they pass this along to buyers, it means a more affordable home.

"We're grateful for it," said Dean, "because the older neighborhoods are not putting the same kind of impact on the land as new neighborhoods."

That's because they already have roads, curbs, gutters and utilities installed -- as well as established police and fire protection. And because these infill lots are near the city center, it's likely their new owners will have shorter commutes, causing less traffic and smog.

Still searching

Another sign of the times is a call for a condo-conversion proposal. The owners of Laurel Glen apartments, on Ashe Road, are asking the city for permission to convert the 60 apartments into condominiums, which would then be offered for sale. Grady said the city hasn't seen a proposal like this in 20 years.

All this translates into more options for buyers like Stephanie and Jason Sanders. Just not when they need it.

Mrs. Sanders said she would consider an infill home in a good neighborhood, but ruled out a condo because she wants a back yard for her children, Dustan, 6, and Kira, 4.

The Sanderses grew so frustrated by their search for a home that they made a deposit on a new home at North Meadows, a subdivision under construction at the corner of 7th Standard Road and Airport Drive.

But after some thought, they realized that location would condemn them to years of fighting traffic. Both parents work near the center of town, and Dustan attends school there, too.

So instead of waiting for that new home to get built, they plan to pull their deposit and resume the search for an existing home to buy.

"Something's going to happen," Mrs. Sanders said. "We just know it will. It has to."

Air quality on the agenda

[Friday, Aug. 27, Fresno Bee, Around the Valley](#)

Registration is open for a Valleywide air quality symposium Sept. 29 and 30 in Bakersfield.

The symposium is titled "Unique Valley, unique solutions: Working together for clean air in the San Joaquin Valley." The registration fee is \$165, due by Sept. 22.

Details: San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District at (559) 230-6000 or www.valleyair.org

Fossilized Ideas on Energy

[Monday, August 30, 2004, Los Angeles Times, Editorial](#)

It's a bit hard to fathom why the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power has been planning to invest as much as \$400 million in the expansion of a giant air-polluting, coal-fired power plant in Utah just as pollution-free renewable sources of electricity are coming into common use and becoming more affordable. Fortunately, Mayor James K. Hahn last week ordered the DWP to pull the plug on this dinosaur of a power plant, telling the department to spend the money on renewables instead. It was a bold and welcome act needed to wrench the DWP out of its outdated thinking.

Because of California's clean-air laws, the plant probably couldn't be built here. Utah is apparently less concerned with smog, despite warnings from the National Park Service that emissions from the Intermountain Power Agency's proposed facility in the west-central Utah town of Delta would threaten visibility in Zion, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef, Canyonlands and Arches national parks. Trashing Utah and its natural treasures isn't the best way to fill L.A.'s energy needs.

Under pressure from environmentalists, Los Angeles recently committed to boost its use of renewable energy sources from 3% to 20% by 2017. That followed an order from the state Legislature last year for private utilities to meet the same goal. But in another sign of the DWP's muddled thinking, the agency claimed that hydroelectric power from Hoover Dam could be counted as renewable. The Legislature specifically excluded power from large hydroelectric plants in its mandate for private utilities. Hahn and the City Council should reject this idea.

Even with Hahn's order, Los Angeles still will get about half its electric power from coal-fueled plants in Arizona, Nevada and Utah. One major source is the Southern California Edison-operated Mohave Generating Station in Laughlin, Nev.

The future of the Mohave plant is now before the California Public Utilities Commission, which is considering whether to order up to \$1 billion in new pollution controls or to simply shut it down. The Natural Resources Defense Council has proposed an alternative - that Edison continue operating it temporarily while developing more renewable sources of power and smaller, cleaner plants. Mohave's coal comes from Navajo and Hopi reservations. The environmentalists said a shutdown would devastate the tribes economically, and installation of new pollution controls would require a shutdown for several years. The PUC should take a close look at the environmentalists' plan.

California should seek any reasonable methods that reduce reliance on coal, truly a fossil of a

fuel.

RUTH ROSBOROUGH-LAROCCA:Patterson's column does little to clear the air issue

Monday, Aug. 30, Fresno Bee, Opinion Column

Thank goodness for Jim Patterson! In a changing, inconsistent world, his consistency is remarkable. Our one-time mayor can be relied upon to turn out the lights, then get up on the wrong side of the bed, metaphorically speaking, complaining.

The headline read, "Air pollution board creates noxious policies." I said to myself, "By George, the man's finally gotten it. He's on the reality train and he's cussin' out (no, I'm sure JP doesn't cuss) the air pollution folks for their snail-cautious tail-dragging."

But I was wrong. Patterson was doing them in for what many of us would consider their rousing non-performance.

Yes, meteorologist Evin Shipp was wrong about this summer's Valley smog. So far it's been a lot milder than last year. Shipp's projection for summer 2004 based on 2003 couldn't possibly apply. What Patterson terms "junk science" was a prediction based on then-available data.

"After reciting the usual scare tactics and laying out the usual goofy solutions ..." Wait a minute, JP: based on which reading, study, discussions with qualified men and women have your pejoratives been founded? "Goofy" does not indicate basic knowledge.

Scary, all right

And "scare tactics"? We were in town for a late-March conference this year. We were scared, and it wasn't by "tactics." One of our best friends was in bad shape all week -- threatened with death by Valley asthma -- in and out of emergency rooms three times.

That was just one asthma victim that week. Good doctors and friends from Fresno churches helped her through to life. Scared? You bet. "Tactics"? You judge.

Let me assure our ex-mayor as I question his information and thought processes, I have been, wherever I've lived, an Ohio Republican.

Name-calling is unattractive. Pejoratives tend to disparage or belittle. Like some Republicans these days trying to call environmentalists traitors to the common good.

Yes, JP, Americans demonstrate. Always have. Calling Americans of whatever ethnicity who want clean air people with "rank (that means stinking) political motives ... a socialist fringe ..." is a particularly unctuous try at rabble-rousing.

Now, would you say that Ruth Larocca can't stand Jim Patterson and thinks he's awful? You'd be wrong: I like him.

A pleasant memory: A few years back, my husband, Al, and I were walking the Fresno State campus on a beautiful spring day, and there was the mayor. We introduced ourselves and had a nice chat. Patterson and I had seldom agreed, and I'd done some pointed writing on our differences. But the man was pleasant and forthcoming -- a gent.

You can like a person and still find his mental processes difficult to comprehend. Curiosity is a necessity in public or private life. It's amazing how many pols are curiously incurious. How many pols of both parties only talk to people who agree with them? Don't really listen to the opposition?

Sorry, what did you say?

Think they're listening -- but they're not? They're only hearing words while simultaneously constructing arguments against them in their heads. Do that, and then you write pejorative lines like, "Bowling to leftist loonies, air district board nixes plan to ..."

Does this help our farmers? Hyperbole doesn't clear the air. Does our ex-mayor think the Valley's air is no problem? Are leftist loonies lying about Valley air pollution? That it's all goofy junk science?

Oh, boy. Let's talk about our remaining family farms -- still the most productive segment of American agriculture. If their local legislators have energy and integrity, they will protect these constituents with aid and tax relief for modernizing expenses.

Many farmers have been polluting with impunity for years. But pity them: Outsourcing of American farmland is beyond them. So far.

How can the Valley air pollution board mission be made viable? First, by changing the methods used to choose members. Then, by merging them into larger, politically responsive units.

Our most important tool is demanding performance from those we elect. Holding them to standards well beyond name-calling.

And by realizing that the issues of polluted air and water, and who knows what else, are real and awful and scary -- and solvable, but by the ballot -- not amateur night performances.

What right have I, living in Columbus, Ohio, to comment?

Fresno is my hometown, and someday I'll be back.

Paper doesn't have to be left on porch

[Monday, Aug. 30, Modesto Bee, Letter to the Editor](#)

We recently received a sad note from our Bee carriers informing us that they will be quitting due to the fact that The Modesto Bee insists that all papers be porched. What are the people at The Bee thinking? Consider the waste of energy; cars idling, pollution, time wasted -- don't get me started. We feel saddened that this elderly couple is forced to quit doing a job they did well and enjoyed doing.

BILL and PATT WALTERS

Turlock

'Hair-brained scheme'

[Sunday, Aug. 29, Fresno Bee, letter to the Editor](#)

That clean-air proposal to pay by the mile to drive (story Aug. 19) is just about the most hair-brained scheme that has come down the pike in a lot of years.

Can't you just see the bureaucrats, each with a desk, a phone and a file cabinet? Maybe we just list the miles we travel each year on our state income tax form. Yeah, right. Every 10-year-old kid will learn how to turn back the odometer.

This proposal should get the clock award (cuckoo division).

We have been pussy-footing around this problem too long. So let's attack the problem at its source. Smog all vehicles and trucks, old cars included. Sure, they will pass the cost on to the consumer, but won't we pay for it anyway?

Robert E. Cooper Fresno

Growing pains

Readers react to development issues from Morada to Tracy

[Saturday, August 28, 2004, Stockton Record, Editorial](#)

Stockton's leaders have rushed into the biggest annexation of land in the city's history, and it seems as if the will of the people is a mere annoyance.

They've even admitted to fast-tracking the process so residents would have no say about development.

This is government by the city and for the city. City leaders are trying to invent a new town, the infrastructure of which is paid for by our dollars but without our consent.

Do the people of Stockton really want 7,000 more acres of housing tracts and 99-cent stores?

Do we want to set some urban-growth boundaries?

We'll never know because the city council voted to grab the land for its big-three developers before we could have our say at the ballot box on Nov. 2.

I'm not against growth. But reasonable growth doesn't include more sprawl, traffic, air pollution and big-box stores before we've even built on the land within our sphere of influence.

Reasonable growth doesn't mean we have to become another Los Angeles, where one town grows into the next with no uniqueness or identity.

Government by initiative might not be the best way to do things. But it's the only choice when elected officials forget they work for us.

If it turns out the people of Stockton want the city to continue growing outward, so be it. To back-door the planning process and shove that decision down our throats is wrong.

We need to speak up to Mayor Gary Podesto and our council members, and remind them this is our town, too.

Mahala Burns

Stockton

Solar should be considered

[Saturday, Aug. 28, Lodi News Sentinel, Letters to the Editor](#)

Every Environmental Impact Report must explore means to mitigate (to make less severe; to mitigate a punishment) pollution generated by the project.

The Lodi Shopping Center Draft EIR (www.lodi.gov) <<http://www.lodi.gov>>, has no mitigation for the project's added air pollution. This, despite the fact that the EIR Air Quality Section shows the project will produce more than three times the vehicle pollution limit recommended by the County Air Quality District.

While not directly mitigating vehicle pollution, there could be total removal of pollution associated with the project's electrical power generation. Our only means of preventing additional generation pollution is increasing renewable energy to match the new power required. This can be accomplished if the builder incorporates photovoltaic electric generation at the site equal in output to their expected peak electrical load.

Connected to the grid through Lodi Electric, any excess power generated would reverse the site power meter. Pollution from old peaker generating units and other fossil fueled units would be reduced since maximum solar power output would occur during sunny hot days. The builder has the option of installing the photovoltaic panels on the roof of the complex (least expensive) or on automobile shade structures like those at Sacramento Airport and Expo Center. The shade structures would benefit both customers and the environment. Shading black asphalt parking lots would reduce heat islanding. Some other advantages are:

1. Photovoltaic panels are currently guaranteed to maintain 90 percent of their rated output for 20 years.
2. A 10 percent federal tax credit and a 15 percent California State tax credit are available.
3. Accelerated depreciation is available.
4. Tons of greenhouse gas (CO2) is avoided per year.
5. Zero pollution is produced.
6. Peak output of the system matches peak demands.
7. With high peak rates factored in, systems are paid off in less than 15 years.

By pursuing solar energy, Lodi Planning Commission and City Council can lead the way and set a positive precedent for Lodi and the Valley. We can provide real mitigation of our rising Central Valley pollution. A "no mitigation" choice punishes valley citizens health and life quality.

Richard Eklund
Lockeford