

AUGUST 2009 NEWSLETTER COLUMN

Well, here we are: stuck in August. Halfway through the monsoon season and we're still getting up to temperatures in the upper 80s and/or low 90s. The natural beauty of a summer dust storm and the fury of a torrential (and short-lived) rain storm has worn off and the talk around the HVAC vent is when will we return to "reasonable" daytime temperatures. Students of all ages are probably grouching about their "forced" return to the classroom while parents move on with life, work, and the normal pace of life.

By the way – please be careful when driving around our schools. Kids don't always choose to use those marked School Zone crosswalks so remember: no passing – 15 mph – and don't assume that the only place for children is on the sidewalk or in the crossing zone.

I know that the last couple of months' worth of columns have been relatively pessimistic as I spoke to issues of budgets, West Nile Virus, brushfires, and other challenges to our County. However, this month I'd like to take some time to chat about some of the more positive things on our collective horizon – things to celebrate and anticipate.

Let's start the tour with a gander at some of the projects on Ak-Chin Indian Community's Tribal Council plate. The Council has called for bids for the construction of improvements and expansion of their wastewater treatment plant – the first step to pursuing an expansion of their casino and conference center, as well as a possible regional shopping center. Talks are underway with the Central Arizona College administration about a site for CAC's Maricopa campus. The Community is also actively seeking to market their Industrial Park as well as exploring the possibilities of the Phoenix International Airport which they acquired some time ago. Chairman Manuel and the Council are clearly committed to working on economic development opportunities for Community members as well as the larger western Pinal County region.

The City of Maricopa is also focused on efforts to bring jobs to the area. In addition to recent announcements concerning a pursuit of solar (generation) opportunities, the City is seeking to build partnerships with private entities for the purpose of acquiring and improving properties for the purpose of creating an industrial park that's improved to the point of being "shovel-ready." Maricopa, too, is engaged in conversations with CAC – continued discussions are also underway with at least one hospital group. Transportation improvements and/or enhancements remain close to the top of the City's list of priorities while their retail sector keeps on expanding with the recent opening of the Wal-Mart Super Center. Several other retail stores are in the works as Maricopa's facilities (their new public library comes to mind) continue to grow in number and scope.

Does this mean that Casa Grande, Coolidge, and Eloy are sitting by idle? By no means! In addition to the cluster of economic development taking place in proximity to the Francisco Grande (and the ripple effects from that are still spreading), there are rail and transportation-related industries doing their diligence on western Pinal County sites. Aviation, aeronautics, and defense sector industries are looking at all three communities

(and the Pinal Air Park) for potential sites while the Union Pacific Railroad's switching yard project continues to wait for a decision by the Arizona State Land Department on whether or not to auction the land. Smaller manufacturing industries are popping up in the Coolidge and Eloy areas as well.

Not to be left out of this mix of Pinal County communities endeavoring to position themselves in such a way as to take advantage of the inevitable resumption of growth and development, our other neighboring Native American communities – the Gila River Indian Community and the Tohono O'odham Nation – are also investigating a variety of opportunities for job creation for their tribal members. The Nation is moving to expand its gaming industries into new markets and considering new and/or different areas of investment in tribal infrastructure and services. The Gila River Community is working with its internal committees as well as its external partners to diversify industrial and retail opportunities in quite a few sectors.

So the sad news is that Pinal County's unemployment rate exceeds the state and national figures; however, the good news is western Pinal County is clearly a target of opportunity and interest in industrial and economic development circles. Let's hear it for the Central Arizona Regional Economic Development Foundation and all of those dedicated economic development specialists throughout our County and at the Arizona Department of Commerce who keep our profile out there. The horizon's getting closer as we speak!

David Snider, Supervisor
Pinal County District 3