

PINAL COUNTY LIFESTYLES

AUGUST 2010

Well here we are at the top of August: our schools and classrooms are just about ready to receive all those new and returning students while some of us are just now getting around to one last summer vacation trip to escape town and still others of us have our heads down and are hoping for some relief from the heat and monsoon season.

As long as I've mentioned the start of school this month, please don't forget that the traffic laws (and common sense) mandate a speed limit of 15 mph in all school zones, when the school crossing signs are deployed – and it's illegal to pass in that designated zone when the crossing signs are out in the street. Fortunately most children remember (for the most part) not to cross a street unless there's a crosswalk with a school crossing guard – but it takes only one forgetful child and one distracted or forgetful driver and we'll have a tragedy. Please join me in slowing down and driving defensively around our schools and their crossings.

In early June, I had the distinct honor and pleasure to be one of a select group of twenty-two county leaders and two state association executive directors from across the United States who went to Washington, DC to participate in the seventh annual County Leadership Institute, a rigorous program originally developed by the New York University Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service for the National Association of Counties (NACo). Realizing that the strong leadership traits that help win a local election may be different from those needed to fulfill commitments in a rapidly changing, highly complex society, the Institute focuses on how elected officials can identify and address what they see as the key issues facing their communities.

The Institute provided an opportunity not only to consider the experience and insights of experts in the field of leadership development, but also to work with colleagues from across the country on specific approaches to address the challenges that all counties share. The intensive program of instruction and discussion provided invaluable insights that will, I trust, help me better serve the people of Pinal County. We not only discussed the core principles of public service leadership with the faculty, but we also collaborated intensively with each other to develop new ways to attack real-life issues of importance to citizens.

I need to add that much of the costs of my Institute participation were covered by the Arizona Association of Counties and NACo. Their sponsorships make participation possible in these economically troubled times. Moving on to other developments in Pinal County, in late June the Board of Supervisors created a Water Element Amendment Task Force for the purposes of undertaking additional research and discussion on several water supply and land use issues stemming from the recently revised and adopted Comprehensive Plan. The Task Force's deadline for their work is May of next year. The primary issue at hand is whether or not the County ought to consider the adoption of a policy requiring development projects to demonstrate the physical availability of their water supply at the time of zoning, rather than waiting until the issuance of building permits.

On June 30th, the Board adopted the final FY 2011 budget. The Pinal County Budget is balanced based on the Board's vision and strategic planning parameters. The final budget is divided into five major components: General Fund, Special Revenue, Enterprise, Debt Service and Capital Projects. The General Fund budget finances a significant portion of the day-to-day provisions of County services and totals \$196,943,665. The majority (70%) of those functions are mandated services. The General Fund budget includes a Financial Stability Reserve that reflects 15% of general fund operating expenditures.

The FY 2010-2011 Pinal County Budget includes \$7.1M in cost shifts, program increases and revenue sweeps from the State of Arizona. In November, Arizona voters will be asked to approve the use of early childhood development and land preservation funding to close the State's structural deficit. If the voters do not approve the measure, we expect additional cost shifts from the State. The proposed primary property tax rate is \$3.9999 per \$100 of assessed valuation. The primary rate consists of mandatory cost shifts from the State of Arizona, general government and funding for the Mary C. O'Brien School. The rate reflects an increase \$0.64 from the prior year – with approximately \$0.28 of the increase is due to state cost shifts.

In answer to the question of where the property tax dollars are spent, 93% of property tax revenues will be used to fund Courts and Public Safety. The remaining 7% will be used to fund cost shifts from the State of Arizona. It must be noted that the Board made some \$500,000 in program and service cuts, and is using \$5M from the Financial Stability Reserve or "Rainy Day" fund to balance this year's budget.

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