

JANUARY 2009 NEWSLETTER COLUMN

As everyone takes a deep breath and slowly exhales, the New Year of 2009 is underway – and where it'll stop, nobody knows. But there are several things we already know about this new year of ours: the economy at large and in a number of specific sectors (housing construction comes to mind) is going to continue faltering before bouncing off the bottom and heading upwards; local governments will be dealing with radically diminishing revenues and, despite increasing demands for services, will be reducing workforce sizes; the phrase “interesting times” will be used more times by more people than the words “like,” “you know,” and “uh-huh.”

Last month, County residents and employees bid farewell to Supervisors Lionel Ruiz and Sandie Smith as they closed out a very eventful sixteen years of service as County Supervisors for Districts One and Two. A celebration of service took place in mid-December with representatives from the Governor's Office, various state, county, and regional organizations joining in the walk down memory lane. It certainly has been my privilege to work with Sandie and Lionel these past four years. They are dedicated public servants – both served multiple terms as local school board members – and they've left a memorable legacy.

However, December was also a time for preparations for the future. Supervisors-Elect Pete Rios and Bryan Martyn (soon to represent Districts One and Two, respectively) joined me in at least four days of non-stop orientation and familiarization with County departments, functions, programs, and services. The briefings have been helpful in providing them with the proverbial 55,000 foot view of the county organization while allowing them a good opportunity to interact with senior county staff and their fellow elected officials. A number of additional, similar sessions are planned during the next three months as Supervisors Martyn and Rios drill down into the myriad levels of the county.

Both Mr. Rios and Mr. Martyn bring passion for public service, a strong desire to see Pinal County continue on its path of reaching our potential, and new perspectives and insights into how we can move forward toward our goals and objectives. I am looking forward to working with these gentlemen in the coming four years. The challenges are many but I'm confident that we'll be up to the challenge.

So what are some of the specific milestones for the first 90 to 120 days? I'd have to say that we'll be paying very close attention to the activities, pronouncements, and actions of the 49th (2009) Arizona State Legislature and the 110th Congress (Second Session). As the saying goes around here: “when the state legislature gets a sniffle, local governments get pneumonia” and so with the shortfall in revenues at state and local levels climbing to totals in excess of \$2 billion for the FY 2009-10 budget year, vigilance will be the byword. We'll be in continuous contact with our state and Congressional delegations and seeking the help and support of State Senator Rebecca Rios, State Representatives Barbara McGuire and Frank Pratt, as well as Congressman Raul Grijalva and Congresswoman Ann Kirkpatrick as we seek to navigate the legislative sessions.

And, speaking of revenue shortfalls – not to mention worrying about what might be done unto us by the layers of government above us (with special attention to mandates for services and programs without additional or any revenues attached to the mandate) – the county’s staff and elected officials have a budget of our own to manage and prepare for the coming fiscal year. I can assure you that the Board and management team will be examining every budget with a great deal of attention. If the abysmal revenue pictures revealed in the last two months of 2008 continue without abatement or improvement, our FY 2009-10 budget will be exceedingly austere.

The third significant issue on the new Board’s plate will be the finalization of changes and revisions to the County Comprehensive Plan. By now the draft revisions have been through a second 60 day public review and input process – staff and consultants have been hard at work over the holidays reviewing the second round of suggestions and comments with an eye to further modifying the draft document. The Board will be briefed on the most current iteration of the draft Comp Plan during its meetings in January and February and if warranted, the “final” draft will be presented first to the Citizens Advisory Committee, then to the County Planning Commission, and then to the Board. It’s been a long and public process that started in January of 2007 with the work of the Morrison Institute and the *Future At Pinal* report.

I don’t know about you, but I think our plate’s pretty full. Stay tuned for progress reports as we work through these and many other issues together. Oh yes – and welcome to the New Year!

David Snider, Supervisor
Pinal County District 3