

DECEMBER 2008 NEWSLETTER COLUMN

Gentle Reader – I had thought to start this column with a gush of typical hyperbole about the joys of the holiday season and being thankful for the positive parts of 2008 while looking forward to the promise of 2009. Clearly there were a large number of wonderful things that took place this year: the successful and peaceful exercise of our country's democratic process; the safe return of many of our neighbors, friends, and/or relatives from tours of active duty in Afghanistan or Iraq; the birth of new children and grandchildren; the marriage of many fine people to their perfect mates; an avoidance of serious damage or hurt from the variety of natural disasters that could have brought great suffering or harm to those of us in western Pinal County.

Equally as clearly, the year of 2008 had low points: not all of our neighbors, friends, and/or relatives returned unscathed or at all from tours of active duty in Afghanistan or Iraq; people of all ages and circumstances died in untimely fashion for reasons that are always unfathomable; businesses failed or down-sized and people we know fell unemployed; the economy stuttered and governments at many levels flailed about in an effort to find solutions or fix the problem.

So what does 2009 look like? In this part of the state and county, much of the positive and negative things that took place in 2008 will continue to happen in whatever measure apportioned to us. Although the turning of the annual calendar with new leadership in government on many levels is cause for hope – the growth and development-based economy that has fueled our county holds minimal hope of significant improvement during the coming twelve months. This level of government will be working hard with its new Board of Supervisors to continue the delivery of quality services to the residents of Pinal County; however, the prospect of fiscal belt-tightening (up to and possibly including reductions in force or elimination of programs) looms large on the horizon.

As you know by now, the County's financial base is dependent on a variety of sources, the economy's performance, and the legislative actions of the state and federal government. This is particularly significant when you consider that approximately 90% of the County's budget (expenditures) is tied to state and federally mandated services and/or programs. Given the reality that the State of Arizona is facing several billions of dollars of revenue shortfall for the rest of the current fiscal year and the totality of the coming fiscal year – it's very likely that Pinal County will be "donating" revenues to the state government without a concomitant reduction in program mandates. Supervisors Rios, Martyn, and I will resolutely do the best we can to strike a balance between fiscally responsible policies and the delivery of services to Pinal residents – but it won't be easy and it may not be pretty.

Back to this month's landscape: regrettably the economic prospects for many during this time of the year are far grimmer than they've been for years and so the need for assistance is greater than ever. Our local Salvation Army has issued an urgent call for Red Kettle help: adopt-a-family sponsors, Kettle sponsors and/or bell ringers are all desperately needed to help those among without homes or the necessities of life – let

alone things like holiday presents for children. Consider calling the Salvation Army at 520.421.4480 or 520.421.2520 and pitching in to help them help the helpless.

Our local civic, veterans, and business groups – Kiwanis, VFW, Rotary, American Legion, Zonta, Elks, and Optimists just to name a few – are also hard at work doing their best to see what can be done to help the less fortunate. And, of course, the religious community in all of its diversity is fully engaged in daily efforts to secure donations of food, clothing, and hope for area folks who are close to the bottom of their resources. I'd also be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the quiet and unsung efforts of those who work for our local governments: city, town, county, school districts, and state workers have been working behind the scenes to organize food, clothing, and toy drives for the economically challenged of all ages. The bottom line? Whenever and wherever you see an opportunity to participate in or support one or more of these great organizations as they labor to help the less fortunate through these times of stress – give a buck, blanket, toy, canned goods, or whatever you can spare. Unfortunately, it could be us needing their help next time.

Finally, returning to the spirit of the holidays, I want to wish everyone the very best of the Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa holidays. It is a very special time of the year and I urge us all to think of those not with us (for reasons of military service or other needs to be anywhere but home with family) and those less fortunate than we are. Give from your heart to help those who must be away or in dire straits – and drive carefully during the holidays so that our children are safe while they're not in school. God Bless Pinal County, Arizona, and the U.S.A.

David Snider, Supervisor
Pinal County District 3