

## MAY 2009 NEWSLETTER COLUMN

Entering May, we bid farewell to last month and bemoan the fact that there weren't a whole lot of April showers to bring out our spring flowers. In fact, an over-abundance of wind and warm temperatures made this past month only somewhat memorable. And, despite the bit of doggerel that insists that the month of May is "merry" – I'm not sure it's true this year. But perhaps I'm ahead of myself.

Before I talk about some more current events, I'd like to compliment the many volunteers that constitute the County's Junior Livestock Committee and organize (and put on) the Junior Livestock Auction during our County Fairs. Despite the down economy, this year's auction saw 350 young Pinal County 4-H kids participate in the Auction. Furthermore, the kids realized approximately \$580,000 in sales that translate into college funds and other scholarship opportunities for the county's young people. Way to go, Pinal!

Although the month of April was chock full of great events, I'd like to salute the Casa Grande Rotary Club for their successful auction (they raise funds for scholarships) and the Maricopa Salsa Festival – they saw in excess of 11,000 eager (and hungry) folks come through the gates for this marvelous event. [N.B. FYI, the salsas, guacamoles, and bean dips were very tasty!]

The last week of April was Town Hall Week: April 19-22 was the 94<sup>th</sup> Arizona Town Hall (held in Tucson) – the topic was "From Here to There: Transportation Opportunities for Arizona;" April 22-24 saw the 22<sup>nd</sup> Pinal County Town Hall focus on the issue of gangs – "Gangbusters: It Takes A Community." Approximately 125 Arizonans participated in the state Town Hall (including yours truly) and after hearing from the likes of Mary Peters (former U.S. Secretary of Transportation) and Scott Moore (Regional Vice President for Union Pacific Railroad), they produced a consensus document with recommendations for Arizona's public policy makers – it will be sent to every elected official in the state.

Our Town Hall event brought together nearly 100 community leaders (including some 15 area high school students) to explore this sensitive and challenging issue. Expert speakers from around the county and elsewhere shared tips and information on gangs, their traditions, habits, organization(s), etc. At the end of the session, delegates compiled 14 strategies (often with action plans) as recommendations for schools, parents, law enforcement agencies, local governments, and other interested agencies. Their strategies ranged from plans to focus on breaking the "gang-cycle" of generational involvement of family members to building awareness at all levels as to the threats and dangers inherent in the spread of gang activity in our county.

Moving to topics of interest during the merry month of May (100 degree temperatures aside), there are several issues to discuss. The culmination of a months' long discussion in our county, saw the United Way of Pinal County and many of their local partners recently articulate an action plan as part of a "Strategic Crisis Management" plan. The

meeting to organize their action plan came as a result of UWPC Director Charity Russell and Central Arizona Human Resource Agency Director Mary Lou Rosales attending a state-level conference exploring the dramatic impact of the current falling economy on Arizona's citizens and the social services that provide the safety net for populations that find themselves in need of help.

Seven critical committees were established for the interim – they are: food security, shelter awareness, volunteer coordination, website/clearinghouse, PSA/media, resource development and legislative committees. I'm pleased to acknowledge that a number of County departments and offices are part of this Strategic Crisis Management operation as we continue to work on meeting the needs of our residents in this time of economic and social challenge.

And speaking of economic challenges, Pinal County's Board of Supervisors is closing in on the final stages of defining our FY 2009-10 budget. By now, much of the shape of this critical financial plan for the coming year is known. Our elected officials and departments have reduced their budgets by 10% while early retirement and a hiring freeze have been implemented. Next month will also see, regrettably, a reduction in force – and other budgetary measures may still be taken. At this point in time, the County's revenues are projected to be nearly \$10M less than the current year's revenues and the complete picture of what the Arizona Legislature's FY2010 budget's impact on our mandated programs, services and state-shared revenues remains to be seen. All in all, the month of May may not be so merry after all.

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