

LOCAL SUN DAY



MICHAEL SMOLENS
Columnist

How decades of prudence positioned county for this

You tend to learn a thing or two over the course of nearly three decades in public office.

One is when you become part of the leadership of a county government that's on the brink of bankruptcy, you make difficult choices, stabilize the budget and cautiously build a deep reserve to avoid getting in that situation again.

That's what Dianne Jacob and Greg Cox did with other long-serving, now-former members of the Board of Supervisors, along with some capable top administrators.

Jacob and Cox joined the board in 1993 and 1995, respectively. They have enacted many policies in the years since, but nothing is more central to their tenure than their fiscal stewardship. The county now has a \$6.2 billion budget with more than \$2 billion set aside in reserves.

That puts San Diego County in a better position to confront the coronavirus pandemic than many local governments.

It wasn't easy to go from near-bust to AAA credit rating, and their tightfisted ways certainly weren't popular with everyone. Critics maintained county employees have been short-changed, departments understaffed and that low-income residents were not receiving enough of the services they need.

Shortly after he took office in January 1995, Cox attended a retreat to discuss, among other things, the county's sorry finances. The main problem was the county's trash system and particularly an ill-fated trash-to-energy plant.

Not long before, Cox had been mayor of Chula Vista, which he said carried reasonable reserves. The county budget at the time was \$2.2 billion "and our reserve was two and a half million dollars."

Employees hadn't received a general pay raise in five years, he said, and many county facilities were in need of repair or replacement.

"I was kind of awe-struck," he said last week. "... It was a pretty bleak situation."

Jacob, who had been chief of staff to a previous supervisor, ran for the board

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CITY CODE TIPSTER APP ON THE WAY

Next step in modernizing San Diego's compliance enforcement division

BY DAVID GARRICK

SAN DIEGO

San Diego is transforming how it handles violations of the city's municipal code — including sewage leaks, abandoned properties, excessive noise, illegal garage conversions and vehicle repair in residential areas.

The city two years ago computerized its system for keeping track of code violation complaints, which is allowing workers to spot patterns,

trends and potential efficiencies in how they handle a typical annual caseload of 5,000 complaints.

Officials also are preparing to allow code compliance complaints to be reported on the city's popular Get it Done! tipster app, which could significantly increase the number of complaints by making reporting more convenient.

But no changes are planned to how the city prioritizes code enforcement cases by category. Imminent health and safety hazards are still top priority, followed by significant violations requiring expert inspections, then quality-of-life violations and then neighborhood nuisances.

The division will continue to re-

main reactive and complaint-based, with the only proactive cases resulting from code officers spotting egregious violations while traveling to and from complaint investigations and enforcement actions.

Leslie Sennett, who leads the division for the Development Services Department, said proactive cases are rare because officers can't be sure that a resident or business hasn't secured a permit for something that appears to be illegal.

"We never want to bother someone with something that's not founded," Sennett said during a phone interview last week.

Short-term, Sennett said the city plans to temporarily suspend investigation of low-level quality-of-

life complaints during the COVID-19 pandemic. But the pandemic has not prompted any other significant changes.

"There have been minimal impacts, and the division is still receiving requests for investigations," she said. "Some staff is telecommuting from off-site locations."

Sennett said the biggest recent change for the division is using Accela software to compile cases and make them available online, so they can be tracked by the person who filed the complaint and the person who allegedly violated city code.

The shift to computers also has allowed city officials to spot patterns and find new ways to conduct

SEE CODE • B10



JOHN GIBBINS U-T PHOTOS

Michael Hart and his wife, Michele Harvey, who have run the Julian News in Julian since 2004, nestle in their tiny, cluttered office.

LABOR OF LOVE IS NEWS TO JULIAN

Michael Hart and Michele Harvey both found a voice and community service in publishing weekly newspaper

BY J. HARRY JONES

JULIAN

Just once, Michael Hart and his bride of 17 years, Michele Harvey, took a few days off to stay at an inn at Joshua Tree.

"It was sort of our honeymoon years after we got married," Hart, 67, said.

"Just once we took off three days in a row," Harvey said. "Those three days and two nights were really all we could stand to be away."

Since the summer of 2004, Hart and Harvey, 69, have been putting out the weekly Julian News. The newspaper was established in 1985 and had a handful of owners before they purchased the business for \$200,000.

"He puts in 70 to 90 hours a week," Harvey said of her husband. "Make that 65 to

70," said Hart.

"I'll bet it's at least 80," she said.

It's a labor of love that pays the mortgage, Hart said, but not much else. They print 2,000 copies each week. Several hundred are purchased from boxes in town while the rest are mailed to subscribers, some of whom have second homes in the area but want to keep up with the town's activities. They have about 300 subscribers right now, a number that varies from year to year and depends on how quickly readers resubscribe annually.

"Probably the biggest question I get is, are you happy doing this," Hart said. "Yeah! It's the closest thing to having a radio station without being able to broadcast. It's community involved, which is what I love. I don't have to pay attention to anything that

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Julian pride is exhibited on Michael Hart's desk at the Julian News office.

WATER DISTRICT SELLING 360 ACRES

Couple hopes to buy portion of land in El Monte Valley for conservation, horse ranch

BY KAREN PEARLMAN

LAKESIDE

Nearly 340 acres of open space in Lakeside's El Monte Valley is going to be put up for sale and interested parties are already raising their hands.

The five-member board of the Helix Water District unanimously voted earlier this month to sell the land along Ashwood Street and Willow Road, a lot it is splitting into three separate parcels. It purchased the land between 1926 and 1953.

Most of the property, more than 230 acres, is zoned for agricultural use, an additional 8 acres are leased to the River Valley Equestrian Center and the third parcel contains a bit more than 100 acres of land zoned for either agriculture or sand extraction.

The picturesque, rural El Monte Valley has been the site of lucrative sand mining operations for decades. Mass protests by residents in recent years have stalled some plans by contractors or developers to use the rich river bottom area of the valley for sand mining operations.

Sand is used to make concrete and asphalt, among other things in home building. According to the American Geological Institute, a typical U.S.



U-T

Lakeside's W. Duane Pillsbury and his wife, Joan Embery, hope to purchase property they now lease from the Helix Water District.

house requires more than 100 tons of sand, gravel and crushed stone for the foundation, basement, garage and driveway.

El Monte Valley is popular with horse enthusiasts and hikers who traverse its trails for recreation. Many have gone up against proposed sand mining operators to fight to preserve the flora and fauna in the area. They have raised concerns about health issues that could come as a repercussion of the mining —

from its effect on the region's natural aquifer to toxic particles wafting through the air.

Asked by Helix Water Board member Kathleen Hedberg if the district had "100 percent certainty (that) we do not need this property, that there is no value in it for Helix Water District," Helix General Manager Carlos Lugo and Director of Engineering Jim Tomasulo said the district deemed it surplus and

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DEFEAT OF 2 MEASURES LEAVES FUTURE UNCLEAR

Experts say housing battles to go back to courtrooms

BY J. HARRY JONES

The March 3 primary election might seem like a distant memory with the results overwhelmed by the coronavirus pandemic.

But the outcome of two countywide measures dealing with housing development in the unincorporated county were a bit confusing and left people wondering what will happen moving forward.

Measure A, which would have required countywide public votes for most large housing projects proposed for the rural and semi-rural parts of the county, lost on a 51 percent to 49 percent vote.

It was a big victory for the building industry and related fields. Many feared that had Measure A passed, it likely would have ended future projects from even being proposed.

However, Measure B failed by a wide margin. It

asked voters to affirm the Board of Supervisors' approval of the 2,135-home Newland Sierra project in North County. The measure lost 58 percent to 42 percent, despite proponents spending about \$7 million. As has been the case this past decade whenever voters have been asked to decide the fate of big housing projects, they rejected the idea.

What happens now? There are a couple wild cards that make predictions tough, experts say: the COVID-19 economic quagmire and the fate of the county's Climate Action Plan, which is still being litigated.

"COVID-19 gave us an entire new world, so it's impossible to answer your question except to offer speculative thoughts," said Borre Winckel, the president and CEO of the Building Association of San Diego County which, along with many of its members, was a major funding source of the No on A campaign.

"The vote on A and B might have been different if it were held today," he said.

SEE DEFEAT • B10

CARDIFF Library Friends group offers scholarships The Friends of the Cardiff-by-the-Sea Library is offering four \$1,500 scholarships to graduating high school seniors...

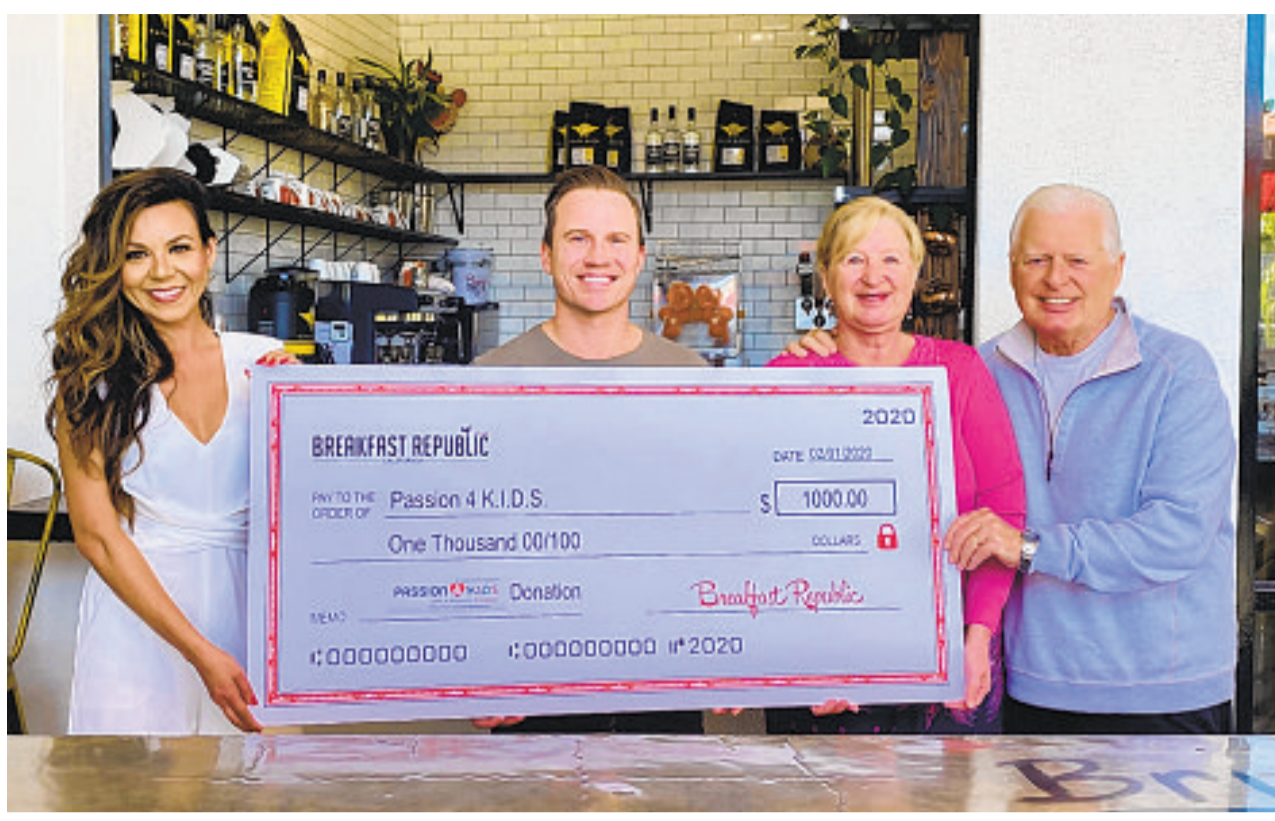
DEL MAR Goodguys car show rescheduled for fall The Goodguys 20th Meguiar's Del Mar Nationals, originally scheduled for April 3-5 at the Del Mar Fairgrounds...

ENCINITAS Blood drive slated at Office Depot Office Depot will host a Mobile Blood Drive with the San Diego Blood Bank from 11:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. April 7 at 1018 N. El Camino Real...

ESCONDIDO Children's art show in April postponed The Escondido Art Association has closed its Artists Gallery at 121 W. Grand Ave. until further notice...

NORTH COUNTY Goodwill not accepting at-door donations Goodwill San Diego is asking community members to save their donations until the nonprofit reopens...

Nonprofit offers nature programs for home Although the San Diego River Valley Conservancy's programs are postponed due to COVID-19, the nonprofit wants to keep the public in touch with nature...



ENCINITAS Passion 4 K.I.D.S. charity receives \$1,000 Passion 4 K.I.D.S. charity founders Linda and Charles Van Kessler (far right) received a \$1,000 donation from Johan Engman, owner of Breakfast Republic in San Diego...



NORTH COUNTY Assistance League provides new clothes, shoes for students The Assistance League of Inland North County provided clothes and shoes for 2,330 students in grades K-12 this school year...

rounding neighborhood. Visit sdrvc.org/03-2020onlineeducationresources.pdf.

OCEANSIDE Donation Weeks set for April postponed Waste Management is taking steps to protect the health and safety of its employees and customers...

Food offered to veterans April 10 The American Legion Post 760 and Veterans Association of North County plan to have fresh fruits and vegetables and canned goods...

RANCHO BERNARDO Community church offers online services Rancho Bernardo Community Presbyterian Church is now providing live worship viewing at 10 a.m. Sundays...

RANCHO SANTA FE Village Church has international following The Village Church, which works with churches in 25 different countries through its mission partners...

SAN MARCOS Free online palliative care courses offered The California State University Shiley Institute for Palliative Care is offering 20 free online palliative care courses...

VALLEY CENTER Museum offers info online, by phone The Valley Center History Museum, which has closed indefinitely due to the coronavirus crisis...

VISTA Alta Vista Botanical Gardens open for walks The Earth Day Festival at Alta Vista Botanical Gardens scheduled for April 25 has been canceled...

PET OF THE WEEK



Animal: Queenie, 1-year-old, 9-pound female domestic shorthair cat with a brown tabby coat. Where: Rancho Coastal Humane Society, 389 Requeza St., Encinitas.

to serve as a safety net for the pets of domestic violence victims, seniors, veterans, active-duty military and families in crisis. Adoption fee: \$100, including microchip registration...

FOOD ASSISTANCE

Agencies throughout the county are offering food assistance. Here are some of them: Feeding San Diego will launch a weekly drive-thru food distribution in Ramona...

food distributions at feedingsandiego.org/coronavirus: North Inland: Community Food Connection at Trinity Church...

RESULTS

CITY COUNCILS CARLSBAD The Carlsbad City Council met via teleconference Tuesday evening and approved its 2019 Housing Element Annual Progress Report...

decided to conduct an application/interview process and appoint a council member from District 2 by May 8, rather than hold a special election. Deadline is 5 p.m. April 15...

Hearings were continued on the draft 2020-2025 consolidated plan for Housing and Community Development and on permits for a non-storefront medical cannabis delivery facility...

SOLANA BEACH The Solana Beach City Council canceled its meeting scheduled for March 25. VISTA The Vista City Council met via teleconference on Tuesday...

Fallbrook High School Teachers Association. SOLANA BEACH The Solana Beach School District board met Monday via teleconference...

AGENDAS

CITY COUNCILS CARLSBAD Carlsbad is seeking resident volunteers to fill several commission and committee vacancies. Find applications at carlsbadca.gov...