

## **Municipal Advisory Councils: Bringing Communities Together**

By Supervisor Linda Parks, June 2009

Many communities have organizations that provide ways for neighbors to meet each other, share concerns and unite to assist with matters for their mutual benefit. From homeowner associations to neighborhood councils, these organizations are able to accomplish far more than residents could working on their own.

While the lines of demarcation that separate neighborhoods, cities, counties, states and even nations are becoming less apparent in our age of instant internet communication, potential pandemics, global economic crises and global warming, there is still the need for neighborhoods to group together as communities.

In my Supervisorial District of approximately 160,000 people, there is one section that stands out for the large number of people who haven't any type of neighborhood organization. The Casa Conejo portion of Newbury Park (bordered by Old Conejo Road, Borchard Road, and the 101 Freeway) is an unincorporated "island" in the City of Thousand Oaks where approximately one thousand people live. Casa Conejo has no homeowners' association, and because they aren't part of the City of Thousand Oaks, residents can't vote for Thousand Oaks Council members. Accordingly, even though they are fully surrounded by the City of Thousand Oaks, they do not have the ear of the City when city development projects bring impacts to their area. Additionally, prior to my tenure as County Supervisor, Casa Conejo (as well as Wildwood and Lynn Ranch) was not represented by the same County Supervisor who represented Thousand Oaks. Instead they were represented by the Supervisor that represents Camarillo. Clearly, Casa Conejo's voice is needed, and desired.

Last week when I called a Town Hall meeting at Walnut Elementary School in Casa Conejo, over one hundred residents attended. Joining me from the County were staff from my office, the Watershed Protection District, Environmental Health, Public Health, Public Works, the Sheriff's Department, and the California Highway Patrol that provides traffic enforcement in the unincorporated areas of Ventura County.

It was apparent from the large attendance, the many questions and the interest and applications taken for membership to the proposed Newbury Park Municipal Advisory Council, that there is a desire in this community to work together with the County.

I have tremendous respect for bottom-up democracy and Municipal Advisory Councils (MACs) are truly an extension of our democracy. Using the model of the Oak Park MAC, I was able to form a MAC in the Santa Rosa Valley in 2003 that, like the Oak Park MAC, has been very successful in partnering with the County to get enhancements for their community. There are also MACs in El Rio in Supervisor Zaragoza's District, and in the Ojai Valley in Supervisor Bennett's District. Forming one in the Newbury Park portion of my District to serve the Casa Conejo area will likewise extend the opportunity for community participation in County government on issues that affect their quality of life.

Some of the activities the MACs in my District have been involved with include neighborhood beautification events, Community Emergency Response Training (CERT), obtaining emergency equipment, solving road safety issues, graffiti removal, making recommendations on development projects, forming Neighborhood Watch programs, and collaborating with neighborhood schools and parks.

MACs are excellent forums for communicating the needs and concerns of residents to the County government that serves them. My office provides the staffing for my District's MACs at no extra cost. I attend the evening meetings to listen to residents and give a briefing on County happenings. While there is no added taxpayer expense associated with the formation of the Casa Conejo MAC, MACs typically do help their area get more service for the tax dollars they already pay. MACs make government more responsive to local needs.

For the Casa Conejo area of Newbury Park the formation of the MAC, if approved by the Board of Supervisors, will also fill a gap by bringing an opportunity for a community to come together and for people to express their desires for their neighborhood and their government.