

## **Happy New Year with County Services**

by Ventura County Supervisor Linda Parks, January 2007

2007 is already upon us and now is a good time to look ahead and see how we can make our future brighter. With a population as diverse as ours, a Happy New Year can mean many things to different people. It may be that the County of Ventura can help you or someone you know have a happier New Year. For example did you know:

If you have a parent who is a disabled veteran, then you are entitled to a free college education at California's public colleges. Some veterans are not aware of the full benefits that they receive for their service to our country. Ventura County provides veteran service experts to help veterans get medical benefits and other services they have earned. Our County's Veteran Services Office brings over \$4 million in deserved benefits to our county's veterans each year. Veteran Services representative Jorge Sotelo assists veterans of the Conejo Valley out of my offices every Wednesday afternoon. Veteran Services officials can help veterans and their families have a brighter future. Additionally, at my request, the County now offers free entrance and camping at our County operated parks to disabled veterans and POW's who hold a State Parks disabled or POW pass card. A park can be a great place to enjoy family, friends, and nature in 2007!

If you have a school child with mental health problems, regardless of your income level, the County of Ventura offers mental health screening and treatment in coordination with our public schools. The Ventura County Behavioral Health Department has a clinic in Thousand Oaks at 72 Moody Court. Clinicians, psychiatrists, social workers and psychologists assist not only school children, they also offer local work training programs with shuttle services for those with mental illness. The County was also a recent recipient of Casa de Esperanza, a 45-unit transitional housing project for the mentally ill that was built and given as a gift to the County by Dole CEO, David Murdock. Located on Lewis Road in Camarillo, Casa de Esperanza is another step in helping the mentally ill in our county receive the tools they need to help manage their illness and move towards greater independence. For information on services and referrals you can reach the Behavioral Health Department at their toll free number: (800) 671-0887. A supportive environment with caring professionals brings hope to those with mental illnesses, and their families.

If you are a victim of a violent crime, the Ventura County District Attorney's Office offers assistance through their Crime Victims Assistance Program. The Program is staffed with compassionate victim advocates who are well trained to assist victims throughout the criminal justice process. There is also a Safe Harbor Program that specifically assists victims of sexual assault. Instead of being interviewed at police stations and taken to hospitals for medical exams, law enforcement officers can now take sexual assault victims to a Safe Harbor location that provides a comfortable home-like setting that acts as a one-stop place to be interviewed, receive a medical exam and get help. Brought together by a coalition of public and private agencies dedicated to serving

child and adult victims of sexual assault, Safe Harbor provides a sensitive, safe and child-friendly environment that decreases victim trauma and intimidation. It would be a great if no one needed this service in 2007, but it's nice to know it is there if someone does.

If you are concerned about fire hazards, you can find helpful hints on how to make your home and community safer at the County's Fire Department website: [fire@countyofventura.org](mailto:fire@countyofventura.org) . The website features frequent updates with valuable safety information for County residents. Our Fire Department is one of the most prepared in the nation and unfortunately, they need to be. Major fires have threatened homes at least once a year for the last four years in Ventura County and there are things you can do to help protect your life and property from fire. The Fire Department also offers free classes to train residents to become members of Community Emergency Response Teams. CERT members can help their neighborhood when disaster strikes. If you'd like to get CERT training you can call (818) 889-2361 if you live in Oak Park, or (805) 449-2453 if you live in other parts of the Conejo Valley. Help yourself and others by getting better prepared in 2007!

The County services described above are just a few of the many ways our County can help people. Of course you can always contact my office to see how we can assist you to make 2007 a healthier, safer, and better year for you and yours. Happy New Year!