

# Inside City Hall

Beyond the headlines

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## **Rain Can't Dampen Spirit of 1,000 Hands:**



Even a torrential downpour couldn't stop the work and dedication of 1,000 hands to complete the community-built playground at Riverway Sports Park. Weather pushed the completion of the playground back by only one day. The "1,000 Hands Playground Project" officially opened on Monday, Sept. 24, after putting finishing touches on decorative trim around the park structures and play areas. Approximately 1,634 volunteers worked three shifts a day, 12 to 15 hours a day, over the six days to make the playground a reality. Leather's Playgrounds provided the design for the playground, one of 1,600 built worldwide. Plans for a formal ribbon cutting are in the works.

## **Business Leaders Hold Emergency Gang Summit:**

Visalia Chief of Police Bob Carden joined Tulare County Sheriff Bill Wittman and local businesspeople at an Emergency Gang Summit on Oct. 3, to develop a strike plan and methodology to take back the streets from the violent, lawless acts perpetrated by gang members in the area. "Whether your business is a service or retail industry – it doesn't matter – we're all affected by the atrocities being committed by gangs and the dangerous situation they create in our community," said Stanley S. Simpson, Chairman Emeritus of Buckman Mitchell Inc., who hosted the summit with the Visalia Chamber of Commerce. "The problem is only going to get worse unless we, as a business community, bind together to tackle this problem head-on." Chief Carden said of the summit, "It's up to everyone in the community to take personal ownership in the issue and band together to reverse this cycle of violence."



## **City Names Interim Fire Chief:**

City Manager Steve Salomon announced Gregory H. Glass has been appointed as interim Fire Chief to oversee Fire Department operations until the recruitment process has been completed and a full-time Fire Chief has been selected. His appointment takes effect Monday, Oct. 8. "We anticipate the recruitment and selection process to fill the position will take between five to six months to complete," Salomon said. "During this interim process, we are fortunate to have someone with Mr. Glass's experience to oversee our operations." Since the retirement of George Sandoval on August 31, Administrative Services Director Eric Frost has been working with Battalion Chiefs Brian Adney, Kevin Gildea, Charlie Norman, Doyle Sewell, and Danny Wristen in overseeing operations of the Department. "We commend the work of Eric and the battalion chiefs to ensure a smooth transition," said Salomon. "The City has a long history of a professional Fire Department dedicated to serving and protecting the community." Glass, who currently resides in Paso Robles, has over 33 years of Fire Service experience, 17 of which were as Chief Officer. He retired in 2003 as the Fire Chief of Monterey after serving there for four years. Prior to that, he served as Fire Chief for the City of Pacific

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*For more information, visit the City's website at [www.ci.visalia.ca.us](http://www.ci.visalia.ca.us), email [nloliva@ci.visalia.ca.us](mailto:nloliva@ci.visalia.ca.us) or call 713-4535*

Grove for five years, and As-sistant Fire Chief for 8 years. He holds his Chief Officer, Fire Officer, Master Instructor, and Hazardous Materials Specialist certificates with the state. He also has earned the distinction of Executive Fire Officer from the National Fire Academy.

**Police Activities League Gets New SUV:** Transporting PAL kids just got easier. Funds from the Vehicle Replacement Fund and a donation from Groppetti Automotive Group enables the purchase of the City of Visalia vehicle, a 2007 GMC Yukon SUV, replacing the group's other vehicle which was purposely set on fire by unknown suspects. Since the incident occurred, the officer has been without a city vehicle to transport PAL kids or tow either of the two cargo trailers assigned to the program. The trailers are used to transport sporting and camping equipment, and other items associated with PAL activities. The SUV also allows the PAL officer to transport several youth to PAL activities due to increased passenger capacity.

**East Downtown Office Space Available:** Let the bidding commence. The City released a request for proposals to the development community on September 21st for the acquisition of a city-owned parcel at the northeast corner of Tipton and Oak Streets. The City has proposed to lease about 25,000 square feet of the office building to establish offices for city employees. This will be the second office building in the East Downtown area; Buckman Mitchell Insurance Agency already has a two-story office building under construction. The new office building represents the City's continued efforts toward the revitalization of East Downtown.

**Water Ideas Flow From Joint Meeting:** Ongoing California water wars and the Valley's growing demand for water flowed to the front of issues discussed at the first, and what some called historic and timely, joint meeting of the Tulare County Board of Supervisors, the city councils of Tulare and Visalia, and the boards of directors of two of the major water management players in the county. A five-member committee was formed to advance the idea of supplying water to Mooney Grove Park, to be delivered via a creek running by the park. The county would build a basin on the eastern side of the park that would be used for groundwater recharge, which is better than letting winter flood waters flow elsewhere. Visalia City Councilman Greg Collins also encouraged more aggressive water conservation.

**City Looks to Future of Light Rail:** It may be decades years away, but planning efforts now could set the stage for a successful light rail system. City Council members from Visalia and Tulare and the County Board of Supervisors learned about three potential routes being studied for a commuter system that could connect the transit centers of the two cities. The routes proposed are Mooney Boulevard, along Highway 198, and along the Santa Fe Rail Line. Because of the tremendous costs—between \$503 million and \$644 million to build a light rail system, plus as much as \$4.1 million a year to run. City and county leaders were urged to promote transit-oriented development. If demand is proven in the future, federal transportation funds could provide up to half the cost. The rest would have to come from the state and from local revenue, including Measure R, a half-cent sales tax to raise money for transportation projects throughout Tulare County.



**Bike, Pedestrian Trails may Link Visalia, Tulare along Santa Fe Trail:** Plans are in the works for a 14-mile trail to become the path of choice for pedestrians and bicyclists alike linking Visalia and Tulare along the Santa Fe Trail. The Tulare County Association of Governments is leading the effort for the Santa Fe Trail Connection, following the route of the old Santa Fe rail line that runs from Visalia to Tulare. Visalia Parks and Recreation Director Vince Elizondo told the group that the city has acquired about 4-1/4 miles of the old railroad route from the St. Johns River to Caldwell Avenue. The Santa Fe Trail provides a much-needed linkage to other waterway trails in the city. Project cost estimates are about \$627,000 for construction of the trail between Tulare Avenue and Avenue 272 in southeast Visalia. Continuing the trail from Avenue 272 to Prosperity Avenue in northeast Tulare would be between \$1.2 and \$1.5 million. Measure R's spending plan includes \$3 million specifically for the Santa Fe Trail Connection to cover land acquisition and construction.

**Let the Lights Go On:** All signals are "go" for a traffic light at Walnut Avenue and Pinkham Street in Visalia to be installed by opening day in August 2008 of the new Annie R. Mitchell Elementary School. Eric Bons, the city's traffic safety engineer, said a traffic signal will be installed at Hurley Avenue and Shirk Street, probably within three years, after Shirk is widened and repaved. In addition, the new signal at Riggin Avenue and Demaree Street will be switched on in about a month, coinciding with the opening of Lowe's Home Improvement store. A traffic signal will go in at Riggin Avenue and Plaza Drive (Road 80) within three years -- sooner if commercial development in the area proceeds.



**District 2 Substation Open House:** The Visalia Police Department's District 2 Sub-Station will hold an open house from 3 to 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 11, at 4100 S. County Center. Tours and refreshments will be provided. District 2, which officially opened on Aug. 27, is the second sub-station to be opened in Visalia. Lt. Steve Puder is the newly appointed Commander of Sub-Station 2. Both sub-stations have a full complement of officers and front office staff.

**Houston Avenue Repairs:** The sidewalks, pavement, gutters and signals on Houston Avenue between Ben Maddox Way and Santa Fe Street will begin to see new life by next Spring. Renovations could take from six to eight months. Project costs are estimated to be between \$2.5 and \$3 million and will include adding sidewalks, curbs, and gutters where there are currently none. Houston Avenue will have two lanes each way, instead of having one lane westbound and two eastbound. Senior Civil Engineer Adam Ennis said long-term plans for that area include extending Santa Fe north through an area where the train once ran.

**Who You Gonna Call?:** This feature of "Inside City Hall" lets Visalia residents know which agencies to call for which problem. The 24-hour hotline gets help on the line. Are there abandoned vehicles on the street? Call 713-4257. Give location and cross streets, a description of the problem, and your name and phone number. Calls are kept confidential, but for best results, the inspector may need to contact you. Remember: The process is put in motion with your one call.