

Inside City Hall

Beyond the headlines

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RECYCLE TREES AT DROP-OFF SITES: Nine drop-off sites will accept your Christmas tree for recycling from Dec. 26-Jan. 12. Ornaments, lights, tinsel and metal stands must be removed. The sites are located at: Save Marts at Campus and Demaree and Akers and Goshen; the College of the Sequoias farm at Walnut and Atwood; Food 4 Less at 2025 N. Dinuba Blvd.; Neighborhood Church at 5505 W. Riggan Avenue at Akers; Parkside Chapel at 3200 W. Walnut Avenue, east of Lovers Lane; the parking lot at the corner of St. Johns and Lovers Lane; Sequoia Mall at the northwest parking lot; and the Sierra Baptist Church at 1437 E. Walnut Ave. For more information, contact the City of Visalia's Natural Resource Conservation Division at 713-4532.

LOOP BUS SNAGS STATE HONOR: The Visalia Parks & Recreation Department received an Award of Excellence from the California Parks & Recreation Society for its LOOP Bus Program, a free youth bus route service for boys and girls ages 6-17. The program, the brainchild of the City's MultiAgency Gang Intervention Task Force, includes five different recreation centers on the LOOP's route, which stops every 30 minutes and takes children to Visalia Community Centers to participate in fun and safe programs and activities. Vince Elizondo, Director of Parks & Recreation, said "The CPRS awards program is the highest recognition our agency can receive. This is a unique and innovative program which could serve as a model for other agencies throughout California." CPRS Executive Director Jane H. Adams, added, "These agencies represent the finest in recreation programming, park and facility design, promotional materials, and park maintenance in California." The award will be presented at the CPRS Awards Banquet March 6 in Santa Clara.

'SUPERHEROES' TO CONVERGE DURING HOLIDAYS: Family events abound during the holidays at the City's Parks and Recreation Department. Join the new Specialty Camp - "Academy for Superheros". Every child has a favorite super hero! The City of Visalia is issuing a call to all potential super heroes to enroll in one week of vigorous super hero training running from January 5-9th. Activities will include exercise, play, learning and a field trip to the mall to build your own "Super Hero" Build a Bear. There are two age groups: (4-7 years of age will be in session from 9-12 noon & 8-10 years of age will be in session from 1-4pm) Sign up at the Anthony Center now! The Parks & Recreation Department is located at 345 N. Jacob Street, and open from 8 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday. Call the Recreation Hotline at 713-4365 or visit our website at www.ci.visalia.ca.us.



TRANSIT FIXED ROUTE RIDERSHIP UP OVER 12 PERCENT FOR '08: Transit fixed route ridership for November was up 4.3% over last year's numbers. A total of 114,463 riders used fixed route service in November, compared to 109,698 for the same month last year. Ridership on Route 9 from Farmersville/Exeter to Visalia saw a bump in ridership of 4.1% for November, from 7,774 in 2007 to 8,092 in 2008. Ridership for the year is up 14.3% - from 38,706 in 2007 to 44,241 in 2008. Through November, fixed route ridership numbers for the year total 634,034, compared to 562,968 for the same period in 2007—an increase of 12.6%.

VISALIA RESCUE MISSION OFFERS SHELTER FROM COLD: Citizens seeking shelter from the cold can turn to the Visalia Rescue Mission, which is serving as a city-sponsored warming center when the temperatures fall below 30 degrees. The mission provides free shelter to anyone in need, regardless of the temperature. During the day, the dining room is heated and tables are set up for use. Parents with children are welcome, and the Fire Department will provide extra cots if needed. Free meals are served three times a day at 6 and 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. The mission is at 322 N.E. 1st St. in Visalia. Those with special needs can contact the Visalia Fire Department at 713-4266 or 734-8116 after hours and on weekends.

COUNCIL APPROVES SITE FOR NEW ANIMAL CONTROL BUILDING:

City Council members, on a 4-1 vote, approved a new 25,000-square-foot city-funded animal control building to be built on 4.5 acres next to the current site on Aviation Drive at the Visalia Municipal Airport. Council Member Don Landers voted no, saying that a site closer to town would mean a higher profile for the SPCA and more animal adoptions. Other possible sites faced opposition from neighbors, and other Council members felt better signs, more publicity and a planned new road to the site should increase its community visibility.

COUNCIL UPDATED ON CODE ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS: Police Chief Bob Carden, Fire Chief Mark Nelson and Housing and Economic Development Department Director Ricardo Noguera presented a review of collaborative code enforcement efforts and accomplishments for 2008 at the Dec. 15 City Council Meeting. Strategies for 2009 discussed included the implementation of the SMART Project Team, which has been created to address specifically identified problem areas or issues in Visalia. The team will be comprised on members from the police, fire, public works, parks and recreation and housing and economic development departments. Other tools to facilitate compliance:

- A receivership process to address the most difficult non-compliant properties. The process requires a request by the City Attorney to a Superior Court Judge to appoint a receiver to facilitate the abatement of a nuisance property. Once the condition is abated, the court can order the sale of the property with the proceeds going to pay County and City liens, cost recovery fees and abatement expenses incurred. The remaining proceeds are then dispersed to the mortgage holder and remaining proceeds to the actual property owner.
- An existing municipal code requiring property owners with rental properties identified as drug properties to either give notice of their intent to move, evict the tenant or provide proof to the City Attorney that the action is not warranted. Failure to comply is a misdemeanor which can be pursued through the Court by the City Attorney's Office.
- Adoption of a new Ordinance placing significantly substandard or repetitively substandard properties on a mandatory 3-year inspection program. Council authorized the adoption of the ordinance identified as the Substandard Housing Inspection Program and the use of other strategies discussed to address future substandard housing issues. Council also embraced the concept of the SMART Project team.

OPERATION SAFE HOLIDAY: For over 20 years, the Visalia Police Department has implemented Operation Safe Holiday, a special community policing project by the City and citizen volunteers to reduce criminal activity in the community around the holiday season. Operation Safe Holiday, takes several steps to increase the safety in and around shopping centers in Visalia. Patrol officers and citizen volunteers will increase patrols at the city's shopping centers. The traffic unit will increase the number of D.U.I. checkpoints during the holiday season to discourage drunk driving. Citizen volunteers will assist with the shopper escort program and increase the hours of the police service centers. The investigations units will conduct several surveillance details to prevent burglaries and auto thefts around shopping centers. For more information, contact Sergeant Steven Phillips at 713-4216.

CALTRANS OVAL PARK STUDY STARTS WITH A SPLASH: On Nov. 13th the first community meeting scheduled for the Caltrans Oval Park Study started with a big splash. More than 100 residents, business owners and non-profit representatives attended the meeting at the Restoration Church on N.E. Third Avenue. TPG Consulting, the City's consultant, hosted the meeting along with its partners CSET and RRM Design Group (based in San Luis Obispo). Mary Beatie of TPG Consulting and Frank Ruiz of CSET, served as moderators of the meeting. They shared concepts with the audience and fielded questions, concerns and ideas on how to improve traffic safety for pedestrians and bicyclists; increase utilization of the park by residents of all ages; and improve the business climate in the immediate area. This was the first community meeting conducted by the consulting team. The project is funded through Caltrans as a State Environmental Justice Grant awarded to the City of Visalia in 2008 to address traffic safety surrounding the Oval Park. A \$135,000 Grant was awarded to the City by Caltrans and the City provided \$15,000 in matching funds. The Study is scheduled to be completed by Summer 2009 with a minimum of three additional community meetings to follow as well as presentations to various city commissions and the City Council. For more information, please call Mary Beatie of TPG at 739-8072.

*Inside City Hall is a publication of the City of Visalia.
For more information, visit the City's website at www.ci.visalia.ca.us, email nloliva@ci.visalia.ca.us or call 713-4535*