

**PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IMPACTING QUALITY OF LIFE
FOR SENIOR RESIDENTS OF MENIFEE/SUN CITY AREA OF
RIVERSIDE COUNTY CALIFORNIA**

With Suggestions and Resources for Addressing the Issues

Proceedings of the Meniffee/Sun City Senior Forum

Co-sponsors of the Forum included the Sun City Civic Association, Kay Cenicerros Senior Center, Partnership for Healthier Communities, Riverside County Office on Aging, and the Riverside County Foundation on Aging.

June 2006

Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging

INTRODUCTION

On June 7, 2006, the Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging and Third District Sup. Jeff Stone partnered to hold a Senior Forum for residents of the Menifee/Sun City area of Riverside County. The Forum was held at the Sun City Civic Association. The Forum was attended by residents of the community and representatives from several agencies and organizations serving older adults. This was the second in a series of community Forums being sponsored by the Advisory Council in partnership with local communities across the County.

Co-sponsors of the Forum included the Sun City Civic Association, Kay Cenicerros Senior Center, Partnership for Healthier Communities, Riverside County Office on Aging, and the Riverside County Foundation on Aging.

The purpose of the Forum was to identify critical needs facing seniors and other residents living in the Menifee/Sun City area, pinpoint gaps in services and programs, and develop recommendations for addressing the needs and gaps. The Forum was designed to gather information that could be used by program planners, policy makers and community leaders.

The Advisory Council on Aging wishes to acknowledge the kind generosity of Sup. Stone, who provided a grant to help underwrite the Forum. A special thanks to the Sun City Civic Association for hosting then event.

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MAJOR ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY PARTICIPANTS AND SUGGESTIONS AND RESOURCES FOR ADDRESSING THE ISSUES

1. Concerns about increasing traffic congestion, truck and automobile noise, and other traffic-related issues.

One prominent concern raised by several Forum attendees was the increasing amount of automobile traffic as the area grows and becomes more congested. Issues ranged from cars speeding on sides street s to inadequate roads and stalled road construction projects in the Sun City/Menifee area.

Sup. Stone acknowledged that given the tremendous population growth of both the County and the Menifee/Sun City area, the County's transportation infrastructure is one of the County's top priorities. Stone noted that Riverside County has two unique funding sources for transportation improvements: the recent voter-approved Measure A (gasoline sales tax) and a County developer's fee, both of which generate over \$300 million a year for the County's use in improving its public infrastructure.

The County Board recently allocated funds to the Sheriff's Dept. to provide for 10 officers who would work exclusively on traffic issues in the unincorporated areas of the County. Two of these officers would be dedicated primarily to the Menifee/Sun City area. But Sup. Stone noted that California state law mandates that traffic enforcement in unincorporated areas come under the jurisdiction of the California Highway Patrol. The County is now working to resolve this conflict to allow a designated number of County officers to begin exclusive traffic enforcement duties. He also noted that Sheriff's officers can enforce traffic violations when they see them, but that they cannot focus exclusively on traffic until the legislative issue with CHP and the State of California is resolved.

In response to a question about the use of speed bumps to slow traffic on residential streets, it was noted that many local jurisdictions that had installed speed bumps were removing them because of lawsuits resulting from damage to cars and injuries to people when drivers did not see the speed bumps. So while these devices are being used in private parks, mobile home communities and other privately owned and maintained areas, they are rarely being used on public streets because of the liability risks involved.

In response to complaints about noise from trucks, cars and off-road vehicles, Sup. Stone noted that the County has a noise ordinance on the books that prohibits the parking of large trucks on local neighborhood streets. He encouraged anyone with complaints about noise coming from such trucks and other vehicles to call the Sheriff's Dept. to lodge a complaint. Under the ordinance, police can cite any vehicle creating noise that exceeds 75 decibels. The County also recently passed a comprehensive off-road vehicle ordinance to restrict the use of such vehicles and reduce noise. But the County has been sued by the motorcycle industry, so the ordinance currently cannot be enforced. Until that legal issue is resolved, the County's noise ordinance can be used to control noise from all types of vehicles.

One resident noted that while road construction on several streets in his neighborhood had started at one point, work was halted and has not resumed, reportedly because the County was short on funds to complete the work. Sup. Stone noted that while the cost of the construction did exceed available funds at one point, the County had received funds under CA. Proposition 42 (the Transportation Congestion Improvement Act) and had targeted 25% of all streets in the Sun City Core for resurfacing. However, upon inspection of the streets, it was found that water from recent rains has cracked much of the original asphalt. Because of the current asphalt shortage, resurfacing work has slowed. However, resurfacing work was scheduled to resume in mid-June and the first 25% of the streets should be repaved by August. Once that work has been completed, the plan is to have another 25% of the streets resurfaced. Anyone with questions about the resurfacing schedule should contact Sup. Stone's office in Sun City for information. The office can be reached at (951) 301-5414, or toll-free by calling (866) 383-2203.

Sup. Stone noted that improvements were being made to or were in the planning stages for several major East-West corridor roads in the area:

- Work on improving Newport Road from Sun City to Hwy. 79 North is about two-thirds completed and work should be finished by the end of the year.
- Scott Road will be improved from the I-15 Freeway to Hwy. 79 North.

- The County is currently creating an assessment district to generate the funds needed to improve Clinton Keith Road.
- Improvements to Hwy. 79 between the Temecula city line and Domenigoni Parkway are currently underway. Hwy. 79 eventually will be two lanes in each direction, and plans are to add a third lane in each direction in the near future.

Sup. Stone also noted that the County is working on plans for widening the I-215 freeway to improve the flow of traffic.

2. Addressing the Information and Support Needs of Family Caregivers

In response to comments about the growing demands being placed upon those acting as caregivers for spouses, family members, friends and others, several resources were cited that can be accessed by caregivers to locate services, programs and other resources to ease the burden of caregiving. Among resources cited:

- **HelpLink** – (800) 510-2020 – The Riverside County Office on Aging’s central referral service to help people locate local services, programs and other resources.
- **Network of Care** – www.riverside.networkofcare.org/aging/home/index.cfm – a website with a comprehensive listing of caregiving and other social and health resources available in the County, plus information on a wide range of caregiving topics.
- **Hospice of the Valleys** – (951) 672-1666. Because the Hospice works with a wide range of agencies and organizations in the Menifee/Sun City area, it can provide information on these agencies to anyone seeking help. The Hospice also is working with Southwest Healthcare System to create a palliative care program for the area.
- **County Office of Emergency Services** – provides speakers to talk with organizations and clubs about steps to take at home to prepare for emergency situations. The Office can be reached at (951) 955-4700. Sup. Stone also suggested contacting his Sun City office at (951) 301-5414 to obtain information on emergency planning and public safety issues.
- **County Department of Public Social Services** – provides programs and services for older adults, including the Adult Protective Services program. The agency can be reached at (951) 358-3000.

3. Affordable and Accessible Housing for Older Adults and Adults With Disabilities

Rising home prices driven by population growth has created a shortage of affordable housing for many older adults. In addition, the ability of older adults to age in place is hindered by the lack of housing with built-in modifications and universal design elements which would make the home barrier-free and usable by residents of all ages and levels of ability. Many builders argue that making modifications to existing homes to accommodate residents with disabilities and other mobility issues is too expensive. As a result, few homes incorporate universal design principles, and many adults are forced to move from their homes when they experience age-related disabilities or mobility issues.

While the County has a program to help subsidize rents for people living below the poverty line, the program has been suspended due to the large number of people on its waiting list. The program currently can provide help only in emergency situations. Sup. Stone noted that he recently called for the creation of a Redevelopment Agency, and that Sun City and the Menifee Valley would be included in its jurisdiction. The Agency would identify areas in need of redevelopment and then, with increased funds received back from the State from the County's property tax base, use that money for specific redevelopment purposes. One targeted area would be building more low- to moderate-income housing, including affordable senior housing in the Sun City/Menifee area.

Sup. Stone also noted that his views on the Americans With Disability Act, as well as efforts to encourage developers to incorporate universal design elements into the housing they build, have changed dramatically since his recent motorcycle accident. The accident had left him (and his wife) disabled for a period of time, during which time he had to use a wheelchair. That experience gave him a different perspective on the challenged people with disabilities face with mobility and performing day-to-day tasks, including maneuvering within their own homes as well as in public places. He noted that the County is working with developers to educate them on the need for incorporating universal design elements in their homes, and that barrier-reduction modifications are not as expensive as many claim. But Stone noted that most builders still resist incorporating these modifications and that continued education is needed to break down resistance.

Mark Moran, chair of the Advisory Council, noted that the Council has sponsored three forums on affordable housing, and that one Forum addressed universal design. But there is still resistance on the part of many builders to incorporating modifications and barrier reductions in the homes they are building. As a result, most homes and even some senior retirement communities lack the modifications and potential for modifications that would enable people to live at home if they become permanently or temporarily disabled. This is a special problem for older adults living in mobile home communities, where making necessary modifications could make the home structurally unsound. Moran stated that most modifications are easy and inexpensive to make, and are certainly less expensive to add when the structure is built than to go back and add at a later date. As one speaker noted, it costs about \$6 to install a wider doorframe in a house under construction. But it could cost as much as \$1,000 to hire a contractor to widen an existing doorframe.

Among modifications discussed were wider doorways, ground-floor bedrooms and bathrooms, built-in elevator shafts in two-story houses, wider stairwells with reinforced stairs and walls plus electrical systems to accommodate chair glides, and appliances and equipment that are simple and intuitive to use.

Susan Mack, a universal design consultant, cited California's Unruh Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination in housing and public access based on a number of factors, including disability and medical condition. The Act specifies that housing being built for seniors must meet the physical needs of those adults. But in Mack's experience, few builders are complying with the Act, and the Act is rarely enforced. Mack observed that developers who have built housing after the Act took effect were at risk, and that the County and community leaders need to educate developers on the provisions in the Act

and how it is applied. Mack also noted that universal design applies to all housing, since households increasingly are becoming intergenerational in nature. She recommended that funds coming to the community through the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program be used to help seniors modify their existing homes to reduce the architectural hazards and barriers that create a risk of injury and prevent them from aging in place.

It was suggested that community leaders become active in educating the International Conference of Building Officials (ICBO) on the need to incorporate universal design principles into their rules and regulations. Currently, only charter cities have the ability to mandate certain building requirements, such as elevators in two-story senior housing. But builders will sue local jurisdictions if such mandates are not a part of the ICBO requirements and if they are not mandated by state or federal law.

4. Lack of Recreational and Other Resources for an Increasingly Multigenerational Community

Several Forum participants noted that the rapid growth of the local population is largely being driven by families seeking affordable housing. As a result, the Menifee/Sun City area is becoming a community of younger families as well as older adults. But because Sun City was largely built for older adults, there is a lack of multigenerational recreational facilities and other resources for families.

Sup. Stone noted that while Riverside County code at one time mandated that developers set aside three acres of land for every 1,000 people living in the homes they were building, the requirement was largely waived in the past. Now, the County has raised the mandate to five acres per 1,000 people, and over 100 acres of parks are slated to be built in the area. In addition, a new senior center will be built and paid for totally by developer fees. A new community center is being built (again paid for totally by developer fees), and a new aquatics facility is slated to be built on a parcel at Newport Road and the I-215 Freeway. The County is working with the local YMCA and Boys and Girls Club to create joint program ventures for the facility. To help capitalize on the growing intergenerational nature of the area, especially the skills and resources older adults can contribute to their communities, seniors will be recruited and encouraged to work with children through literacy and other programs that will be offered at the community centers. These and other similar ventures that bring the generations together could help make Sun City a model community in this regard.

5. Lack of Access to Quality Medical and Health Care

Rapid population growth has put tremendous pressure on existing medical care facilities, including the local community hospital and emergency medical services. The Menifee Valley Medical Center was built to handle a much smaller population. Consequently, many local residents have been forced to drive up to 20 miles to receive emergency and, in some cases, in-patient primary care. Forum attendees noted that in addition to the

shortage of adequate medical care, there is a perceived quality of care issue as well as a shortage of physicians, including geriatricians.

Thomas Dougherty, administrator of Menifee Valley Medical Center, responded to the voiced concerns, noting that the medical center is attempting to get a bond issue approved so it can double the size of its emergency services department and expand the number of inpatient beds. If the bond issue passes, the medical center also will build a new tower. Patient rooms are now being renovated and the medical center's surgical and other support services are being upgraded to accommodate the planned expansion.

The medical center also is working actively with its medical staff to attract physicians to the area. Dougherty noted that three new physician office buildings were under construction near the medical center, and that the planned medical center expansion and modernization of its equipment will help attract more physicians.

But Dougherty cited impending Medicare payment cuts, and noted that the medical center needs the active support of local residents and community leaders, including the County. He encouraged residents to let him know of their concerns, and indicated that he was willing to meet with residents and community leaders to discuss their concerns.

Sup. Stone noted that that he is a strong supporter of the efforts to establish a medical school at the University of California Riverside, since this would bring new medical resources and physicians to the area. Stone is eager to create a partnership between the medical school and the County, and noted that the presence of a medical school in Riverside could help alleviate the shortage of physicians in the area, especially geriatricians.

6. Lack of Adequate Public Transportation

While highway and road improvements will help ease traffic congestion, public transportation plays a strategic role in reducing automobile congestion. But as one resident observed, the availability of public transportation in the Menifee/Sun City area is limited and often difficult to access.

Sup. Stone noted that the County is taking the issue of public transportation seriously given the fact that Riverside County is now the fastest growing County in the State and, especially, the recent rise in the price of gasoline. Stone reported that his office is studying the route structure of the Riverside Transit Agency to identify and propose efficiencies to the system. He asked Forum attendees and all residents of the Third District to let his office know how they think the system could be improved and made more accessible and convenient. He also noted that an expansion and greater use of the local Dial-A-Ride service might provide a more efficient way to move people in the area. Finally, Sup. Stone noted that current plans call for the MetroLink rail service to be extended from Riverside to Perris, and eventually to Hemet.

7. Increasing Incidence of Homelessness

Homelessness is a problem in many County jurisdictions, and is now becoming a problem in the Menifee/Sun City area. One reason for this is a migration of homeless individuals from other areas of the County, including Hemet. Stone noted that Hemet has created one of the few facilities in the area to address the needs of the homeless in a comprehensive way, and that in his view, regional homeless centers providing comprehensive services was the best way to tackle the problem of homelessness.

Sup. Stone announced that he and 5th District Sup. Marion Ashley have partnered to build a regional homeless center that will include medical care, vocational training, transitional housing and other services to try to get at the core root of homelessness. A joint powers committee with representatives from each city in the Districts and the unincorporated areas is being created, with the County serving as lead agency, to plan and build the regional facility. A consultant specializing in the issue of homelessness has been hired to guide the County through the process, and the cities involved have been notified to begin appointing representatives to the committee to begin the site selection process.

8. Financial Scams Against Seniors

Older adults often are targets for unscrupulous contractors and sales people, especially in the area of home repair and renovation. The Riverside County C.A.R.E (Curtailling Abuse Related to the Elderly Program will help seniors by coming to their homes and reviewing a contractor's proposal to help determine whether the repair or renovation is needed, and whether the bid is reasonable or suspicious. The C.A.R.E program can be reached at (800) 476-7506. Sup. Stone noted that his office is available to help facilitate the process, answer questions and serve as a referral source.

9 Reaching Residents With Information on Services and Resources

Because Sun City and Menifee are not cities but are communities within the County jurisdiction, there are no city agencies to produce and disseminate information to residents on available programs and services. The area lacks a local newspaper, and residents face a shortage of communications channels to both provide and receive information, including the kind of information discussed at the Forum.

One attendee suggested that future Forums (and similar community events) be videotaped, and the videotapes made available to local senior centers, community agencies and other local venues where they could be shown as an education and information resource.