

# MyValleySprings makes government your business

## Calaveras Treasures

Written by Sunny Lockwood

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Long before the Tea Party appeared on the national scene, small groups of Calaveras citizens were actively working to preserve and enhance our beautiful county.

From West Point to Vallecito, and Copperopolis to Dorrington, groups of local folks take it upon themselves to keep parks clean, libraries open and various boards and committees staffed and functioning.

And small groups form around political issues in an effort to influence local decisions.

One of the groups I've watched is My Valley Springs, an organization that grew out of a town hall meeting several years ago, where a developer presented his plans as if they were already a reality.

Colleen Platt, who had moved to Valley Springs in 1993 and likes the area's wide open spaces, asked one question: "What are you going to do about the intersection of Highway 26 and Hogan Dam Road?"

According to her, the answer received was "Nothing."

And that started her on a quest. Concerned with the increased traffic such a development would create, she wrote letters to the newspaper and began speaking up at Board of Supervisors meetings. She researched the county's planning and development process. Other folks who read her letters in the newspaper and agreed with her concerns, got in touch. Soon, a few Valley Springs residents were meeting regularly to share information and talk about how they wanted their area to grow and develop.

In 2005, this group became an official non-profit corporation.

Although My Valley Springs is still a relatively small group, it, like other such groups in our county, has made a significant impact.

"Our common thread is that we love the rural quality of life here," says Joyce Techel, president of the group. "We were seeing oaks cut down, and traffic increasing and that the roads weren't being improved and we just felt that the county could do a better job of developing itself."

When they started educating themselves, they discovered that there were more than 3,500 housing units being reviewed or proposed for the Valley Springs area.

"That was a shock!" says Joyce.

Now Colleen, Joyce or other My Valley Springs members attend Planning Commission meetings, Board of Supervisors meetings and transportation planning meetings. They both gather and disseminate information about development in the county.

The group has a web site -- [MyValleySprings.com](http://MyValleySprings.com) -- where all sorts of planning and government news is posted.

Joyce, who has been in the county since 1977, says that being part of My Valley Springs has given her a full-fledged education in county government and the planning process.

"It's brought new friends into my life. And because we have been successful in things

we've done, I feel that I've made a difference."

My Valley Springs has helped educate people throughout the county. It initiated the videotaping of county Planning Commission meetings. Those videos air on Calaveras Public Access Channel 9 and also online. There's a link from the website to the video site.

My Valley Springs also updated the oldest community plan in the county. The Valley Springs Community Plan was 37 years old when My Valley Springs began its updating work.

"Because our community plan was so old, it had no vision for the future of our Area," Colleen says. "Now the updated plan is being reviewed by the county. The next step is to get it implemented."

My Valley Springs has actually saved some of the old oak trees in the Valley Springs area. They were slated to be cut down for a development, but through efforts on the part of My Valley Springs, fewer were actually felled.

"I think we saved about six more oaks than the developer originally planned," Colleen says.

Not too shabby for a group of locals who care.

So I give a symbolic tip-of-the-hat to My Valley Springs, and to other citizen groups and volunteer groups that work to make Calaveras County the Treasure that it is.

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