

'Action Project' sticking up for public

By Buzz Eggleston

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A new citizens group has formed to help cast light on quality-of-life issues in Calaveras County, where natural resources are under pressure from increasing development.

"Calaveras County is at a critical crossroads," said Ward La Valley, the group's coordinator. "Important decisions regarding development, land use, resource conservation, and preservation of our rural lifestyle are all looming in our immediate future."

Serving as directors of the new group, the Community Action Project, are chairman John Trinkl of Arnold and San Francisco, Addie Jacobson of Murphys, Agata Sulczynsky of Dorrington, Penny Sarvis of Murphys, Robert Dean of Mokelumne Hill, and Bob Graham, a former Arnold resident who now resides in San Francisco.

CAP was formed by Ebbetts Pass Forest Watch, a five-year-old organization that advocates protection and restoration of healthy forests and watersheds in the Sierra Nevada.

"The mission of CAP is to promote community-based democracy in Calaveras County so that local citizens have the maximum possible control of quality-of-life issues that affect them," the new group said in a Web posting. "Behind this mission lies a vision that by promotion of and participation in the local democratic process, CAP will facilitate the adoption of sustainable timber harvest practices in the county and the maintenance of a high quality of life both in the county and region."

The first step for CAP was to hire La Valley as its coordinator.

A San Andreas resident with an extensive background in communications, he is responsible for developing plans to educate the community, build broad-based countywide support, identify action plans and mobilize the community.

"One of CAP's core beliefs is that citizen understanding of and involvement in the decision-making process will produce better decisions than have been made in the past. We don't have to just accept things that are happening in our county, we can create our future together," La Valley said.

He plans to compile a roster and track the progress of significant residential and commercial development projects, timber harvest plans, and mining projects proposed in Calaveras County.

Basic information on community meetings, public hearings and other developments will be regularly updated. The Calaveras Enterprise has agreed to work with the group to disseminate information to its readers.

"CAP plans to hold community meetings in different parts of the county to hear what the issues are," Trinkl, the group's chairman, said. "Calaveras is a very diverse county, and while there are common concerns, there are also problems particular to the community. We'll be meeting with existing

community groups, too. We plan to do surveys and opinion polls. We're trying to get funding to do a very thorough, scientific survey. CAP is reaching out to people across the county to share ideas and to work together. We're broadening our board so that it will represent the different constituencies in the county."

Trinkl said his group already knows some of the issues it will hear about.

"People in the county have concerns about the effects of rampant growth and development, oak tree preservation, clearcutting, maintaining the character of Calaveras that attracts people here, etc.," he said. "But people often feel that there's not much they can do about these issues. We'll try to help facilitate discussion and action on these issues, by holding meetings, setting up task forces, bringing in people to offer training, setting up meetings with government officials and boards.

"Part of the reason people sometimes feel left out of processes that will affect them is that they don't have information," he continued. "We'll be working to make development issues more public and government agency workings more transparent. We are gathering information on the status of different development projects, community plans, the county general plan, and we will make this information more easily accessible to people. We'll also be getting information out about how people can take action: upcoming meetings, hearings, where people can make comments, who to talk to, etc."

At least three county supervisors are supportive of CAP's intentions.

"As I understand the CAP group, their goal is to educate and inform people and to get them involved in land-use decisions in their communities. I think this concept has significant merit and I encourage the public to become informed and involved in decisions affecting their future," Supervisor Bill Claudino said. Claudino represents the 1st Supervisorial District, which includes the communities of San Andreas, Valley Springs, Campo Seco, La Contenta, Comanche, Burson and Wallace.

Steve Wilensky, the District 2 supervisor, said CAP will help fill a void in the decision-making process.

"In as much as this is to strengthen the level of participation of the average citizen in the planning process and our response to growth pressures, this will be a benefit to our county. It is the citizen voice that is missing in the equation," he said.

Typically, today's public participation is limited to responses to events in their own neighborhood. "Right now we really lack a cohesive context," he said.

Wilensky's district includes the communities of Mokelumne Hill, Paloma, West Point, Wilseyville, Glencoe/Railroad Flat, Sheep Ranch and Mountain Ranch.

Merita Callaway, the District 3 supervisor, said she is encouraged by what CAP wants to do.

"The scope is larger than Ebbetts Pass Forest Watch and their mission is fairly focused. I think CAP has the ability to bring groups around the county together over common concerns," she said.

Callaway's district includes the Ebbetts Pass area down to, but not including, Murphys.

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