

October 31, 2005

Message from the Chair Emeritus—Dick Johanson

One cannot make an effort to be in tune with all that is going on around here without acknowledging the strong motivation for change that is emanating from the private sector. Committed and knowledgeable volunteers and organizations within both the private and non-profit arenas are leveraging their assets with public sector resources. While we have a long road to travel, particularly in the areas of poverty, job creation and education, we are beginning to see significant improvements. We know the direction in which we are going. We are on the move. We are not standing idly by waiting for an external elixir of some kind that will solve our internal problems.

OUR THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: "No One Can Steer A Parked Car"

A Focus on Solutions—Operation Clean Air

The Summit organizers delivered more than they promised. Not only did we hear about solutions, we learned about results and many came away believing we will clean the air. When Operation Clean Air launched, the notion of voluntary actions drew skepticism. Too often we have allowed laws and regulations to establish minimum standards rather than focusing on the very best we can do. Panel after panel discussed advances they have made in response to regulatory requirements, but also affirmed their commitment to doing more in collaboration with others. It was fascinating listening to the agricultural panel discuss the many strategies for curtailing emissions ranging from technological advances and changes in daily practice. The builders, planners and developers offered up a vast array of green building strategies, transportation choices and land use decisions that impact air quality. Operation Clean Air is about cleaning up the environment and economic prosperity. The underlying themes are responsibility and unity. Many thanks to Hal Bolen (Bolen, Fransen & Russell), whose steadfast stewardship of this vital issue has brought people together behind common solutions.

Keynote at Summit Discussed Collaborations Across the County

To keynote the Air Quality Summit, Operation Clean Air invited John Parr one of the country's most gifted practitioners of collaborative governance and citizen engagement. Parr is also the President and CEO for the Alliance for Regional Stewardship, a national network of regions working together to meet the challenges of the global economy in ways that recognize interdependence and aim towards sustainability. Ironically, when speaking to other communities, Parr noted he often uses Fresno as an example. The Regional Jobs Initiative and the Collaborative Regional Initiative are examples of all sectors stepping up together to meet critical challenges no single organization or sector could meet alone. The Alliance convenes conferences twice a year in cities across the United States to showcase what various regions are doing. At the next one in Louisville, Ashley Swearengin, the COO of the Regional Jobs Initiative, will serve on a panel to discuss how multi-sector collaboratives work. The Alliance website is filled with resources and case studies. Go to www.regionalstewardship.org.

San Diego School Reforms Heralded as Potential Blueprint

Like most communities across America, leaders are struggling to figure out what reform efforts work. One of the challenges is remaining focused on one set up strategies long enough to find out. San Diego Unified School District implemented a set of reforms to improve reading skills in 1999 which targeted elementary and middle school students. The reforms included double and triple length English classes, extended school days, and summer school reading programs. The strategies focused upon prevention, intervention and retention, although only 1% of the students participating were retained. In elementary schools, the Blueprint narrowed achievement gaps along racial, ethnic, language and socioeconomic lines by about 15 percent over two years. In the middle schools, achievement gaps closed about 5 percent. Unfortunately, the programs did not have a significant impact on high school students. While there was a concern that math skills might suffer, not only did this not happen, but in some cases math skills also improved. Reading is clearly the gateway to education.

Upcoming Meetings

Thursday, November 10--11:30 to 1:30 p.m.—Annual Membership Meeting—Pelco