Claudio Valenzuela Appointed as Registrar of Voters

The County’s new Registrar of Voters’ first day on the job this week was much like it has been each day of the last nine months. Claudio Valenzuela has been acting Registrar since mid-year last year; after a nationwide recruitment for the position, he was offered the job and was officially appointed Registrar on March 10th.

Valenzuela has worked in the Elections Department for the last 13 years in various capacities. Prior to Elections, he worked in the Silicon Valley high tech industry. So what lured him into the world of elections?

Valenzuela explains how elections work turned from a job to a passion.

Q. What brought you to the Elections Department?

A. I was commuting to Santa Clara daily and wanted a job closer to home. When I was offered a job at the Elections Department, I told the hiring manager I could only stay for one election since I was interested in continuing my career in the high tech industry. I was hired as an election services specialist in charge of polling places and poll worker recruiting and training. That was 13 years ago!
Q. How are elections managed and what happens in the department between elections?

A. The Elections Department conducts all public elections in the County, including local or statewide special elections, recall elections, special bond elections, vacancies and referendums. Normally an election takes six to eight months to prepare so it is not easy to manage simultaneous and overlapping elections.

During even number years we have two scheduled elections and in odd number years we at least have one, but we usually conduct more; we have had as many as five in one year.

When staff is not preparing and conducting elections, there are ongoing duties such as:

- Maintenance of the voter registration database, which happens on a daily basis
- Working with candidates for county and local offices during the filing process and year-round
- Process petitions for local and state measures, referendums and recalls
- Seek and secure polling places and survey polling locations
- Recruit and train poll workers

Q. What is something people would be surprised to learn about the Elections Department?

People are often surprised to learn that our department does not determine the rules that govern elections, nor are we affiliated with any political party. Also, of our 12 full-time employees, five have or will have postgraduate degrees this year.

Q. What are challenges ahead for your department?

One is participating in the development of the statewide voter registration database, which is mandated by the Help America Vote Act. We are currently working with the Secretary of State to do our part for this implementation. When the project is completed in 2016, it will allow Californians visiting the Secretary of State’s website to more easily submit a voter registration application, update their voter registration record, find their polling place, check the status of their vote-by-mail or provisional ballot, and much more - all in 10 different languages.
The implementation of the database requires changes to our procedures and it will have a significant impact to all our program areas such as registration, vote-by-mail, candidate filing, precinct services and the general administration of elections.

At the local level, our department has a great need for permanent headquarters. Our current quarters are leased and not really designed for the type of work Elections does. Also, the voting equipment used by Monterey County is aging and we are researching options for replacement.

Health Department Part of State/Regional Campaign Kick-Off

The Monterey County Health Department was recently in the news for its role in kicking off the Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community campaign. But did you know this effort involved our Health Department as well as those in Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties, working together with the other agencies throughout the state?

On Wednesday morning, March 5th, representatives from the three local county health departments ‘met the press’ in Salinas for a joint announcement, which was coordinated with 13 other locations and press conferences around the state.

"This is the first time the three counties have come together to do a press conference of this kind," says Karen Smith who is the Health Department’s Public Information Officer. "When you think about it, it makes perfect sense as this issue does not stop at county borders."

(L-R): Gonzalo Coronado, Tobacco Control Program Coordinator; Ray Bullick, Health Department Director; Dr. Ed Moreno, Monterey County Health Officer; Sam Perez, San Benito County Public Health; Dr. Lisa Hernandez, Santa Cruz County Health Officer; Karen Smith, Monterey County Health Department PIO; Rose Vasquez, Health Program Coordinator; Gina Cole, Santa Cruz Tobacco Coalition; Ofelia Toledo-Prieto, Tobacco Coalition of San Benito County and Dale Hillard, Monterey County Collaborates.
The issue is the Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community campaign, which includes survey results which shed light on the type of products that are available and promoted in our communities. At the launch event, all three departments shared new, local data regarding how tobacco, alcohol and other unhealthy items are marketed to youth. You can find out more about the overall program and additional details about the survey here.

In Monterey County findings included:

- 76% of stores surveyed sell candy, mint and liquor favored tobacco products and are near schools
- 36% of stores are posting alcohol ads near candy and toys or below the three foot level, which is eye level for toddlers and young children
- 74% of stores sell ‘alcopops,’ which are alcoholic beverages, sweetened with fruit flavors
- 72% of stores sell flavored non-cigarette tobacco products such as cigarillos
- Only 30% of stores surveyed are selling good quality fresh fruits and vegetables.

Logistically, the coordinated program launch and survey data release required extensive pre-planning and good communication between departments. The California Tobacco Program had the job of making sure all counties involved did not release information early and that participants stayed on message.

“We were lucky to have great partners in this endeavor,” says Gonzalo Coronado, Monterey County Tobacco Program Coordinator, who also pointed out the project came with unexpected cosmetic needs. “We did have to be creative at times, such as locating something to cover unsightly outlets on the wall behind the speakers for our press event. We borrowed a large piece of art and an easel, providing just the right finishing touch behind the podium.”

Sheriff’s Office Collaborates to Create Fallen Deputy Memorial

The Sheriff’s Office has launched a special project to honor deputies who have died in the line of duty.

Plans have been made for a Sheriff’s Memorial, which will be located on the grounds of the Public Safety Building at 1414 Natividad Road in Salinas.

“Eight deputies have lost their lives in the line of duty since the Sheriff’s Office was established in 1850,” says Sheriff Scott Miller. “It is a symbol of gratitude to these fallen
heroes and their families and a visual reminder of the dedication of local law enforcement to our community.”

Groundbreaking for the Memorial happened last November and construction will begin in May. It’s expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Besides serving as a tribute, the Memorial will also serve as a powerful safety reminder. To increase safety awareness, information about the deputies and their histories will become part of a training program for new Sheriff’s Office staff.

Of the eight deputies honored at the Memorial, four died in the line of duty before the turn of the last century. The last four served Monterey County during the last 40 years. Those officers are:

- Deputy Craig Knox – End of Watch June 1, 1980
- Deputy Jerralee Jane Jacobus – End of Watch June 1, 1980
- Deputy Robert Shaw – End of Watch April 9, 1988
- Deputy Anthony Olson – End of Watch September 24, 1996

The Memorial project is certainly a labor of love, near and dear to the Sheriff’s Office, but it is also a collaborative project with community donors who are sponsoring the project. To find out more about the project, there is a website: [www.montereycountysheriffsMemorial.org](http://www.montereycountysheriffsMemorial.org) or you can contact Donna Myers at (831) 796-3083.