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County Cuts Hit Sheriff's Office, 4-H Program Given Reprieve

By Jennifer Wake

The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors approved a budget on March 31 that cut \$50 million from county programs, resulting in potential layoffs of 56 sheriff's deputies and 18 district attorneys, as well as the elimination of non-emergency health care to adult undocumented residents.

Fortunately, Lafayette and Orinda police departments, which contract police services through the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department, do not foresee any adverse consequences from the cuts.

"Because the deputy sheriff positions with the Orinda Police Department are fully funded by the City of Orinda there will be no layoffs," said Orinda Police Chief Bill French. "I do not anticipate any drop off in the level of service that we offer the residents of Orinda. We will continue to provide the best service possible. Times are tough, but there has been no impact thus far."

And in a surprise decision, the County's 4-H program got a reprieve.

At the March 31 meeting, the Board unanimously approved to fully fund through fiscal year end the University of California's Cooperative Extension (UCCE), which runs Contra Costa County's 4-H program.

Lafayette resident Scott Compton, who has been involved in 4-H for ten years, was surprised by the decision.

"Somehow the local 4-H program dodged the budget bullet for now," Compton said. "In light of the dire condition of economies - from worldwide to U.S., California to Contra Costa County - it was expected that the 4-H program would be impacted. And seeing that at the same Supervisors meeting, police and medical programs were under the knife, I was totally surprised that 4-H survived immediate cuts."

In a letter to 4-H Community members, Acting County Director Janet Caprile explained how the decision to fully fund UCCE through the end of June will "allow time for the Board to try to find a reasonable level of funding to keep us operating for the next fiscal year (July 1, 2009 - June 30, 2010)." The County currently pays 12 percent of the 4-H Program's annual budget.

"It is not over yet, but the situation looks more hopeful," she said.

Caprile credits the decision to grassroots efforts made by volunteers. "We would not have even this glimmer of hope and opportunity without the strong show of support from the many who wrote letters, made phone calls, and spoke at the hearings," she said. "The room was packed at both the March 17 and March 31 hearings with supporters who spoke eloquently on the importance of Cooperative Extension in Contra Costa County."

The UC Cooperative Extension's Youth Development Program (YDP) administers the 4-H program with support from the county, according to Compton, who has served as a liaison between clubs and the Cooperative Extension.

"The local office provides a central point for dissemination of information, coordinating county-wide activities, liaison with state/national organization, and meeting space. I believe that the county provides the building and funds staffing. But the overall program is that of UC," he said.

In Compton's opinion, every youth and adult learns from 4-H. "Many not familiar with the program think of 4-H as an animal-raising club, as it originally was," he said. "But there is so much more. Youth members pretty much govern

their clubs. Local participation and community service are a significant part of the program."

Although further cuts are anticipated, Supervisor Gayle Uilkema said the Board will continue to look for alternative means of funding, keeping a close eye on where the federal stimulus money will go within the state.

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