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# U.S. Borax celebrates 145 years of American innovation

*Editor's Note: US Borax, part of Rio Tinto, celebrates 90 years in Boron, CA and 145 years of continuous operation this year. Below is an excerpt from a four-part series on the discovery of Borax and its enormous impact to the local community and the world.*

**How the town of Boron was Born**

In 1926, 50 miles south of Crumville, a man named Osborne built a “cheap mine shaft” in the “barren Mojave Desert.” One early morning, the mine operator woke him, insisting he look at the bottom of the shaft for what Osborne called “a white mass of the purest borax ore I had ever seen!”

In 1927, Pacific Coast Borax began mining operations. Over the next 15 years the borax settlement named Amargo (“bitter water”) was changed to Boron, and Crumville (for dairy farmers Crum brothers) became Ridgecrest.



A line of trucks awaits work at the U.S. Borax mine in Boron.

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A typical scene from the daily operations at the U.S. Borax open-pit mine in Boron.

**US Borax: 90 years of operation in Boron**

Today, Osborne’s discovery is the site of California’s largest open pit mine, owned and operated by US Borax. From Boron it goes to the company’s Port of Los Angeles operations, to supply around 30 percent of global demand for borates to more than 1,700 delivery locations in 100 countries.

**Death Valley and the 20 Mule Team**

The company traces its roots back to 1872 and a dry Nevada

lakebed called Teels Marsh. It was in the notorious Death Valley where teams of 20 mules and wagons hauled 165 miles from the mine to the railroad at Mojave. Later, the company made 20 Mule Team its trademark and named its laundry booster 20 Mule Team Borax, still found on grocery shelves today. From 1930 to 1975 the company advertised its 20 Mule Team Borax products by sponsoring a radio, then television show, Death Valley Days, making the Twenty Mule Team a media sensation.

**Spirit of Innovation**

Over the years the company’s pioneering spirit has led to numerous technology advances in the way Borax is mined, refined and shipped all over the world. Yet some of the most extraordinary innovations are the uses of borax all around us.

**Pioneering Progress**

In the next five years the company plans on increasing output and expanding its agricultural product line. As the company grows it plans to increase hiring, with a goal that 10 percent of new hires are Veterans. Learn more at [borax.com/careers](http://borax.com/careers). ❖

**Join US Borax at Boron 20 Mule Team Days Oct. 7**

9:45 – 11:30 a.m.: Meet the new 20 Mule Team as they parade down Twenty Mule Team Road.  
Noon – 3:45 p.m.: Be sure to attend a site tour starting at the Borax Visitor’s Center every 15 minutes.

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# NAWCWD: Growing to meet the need

By Jack Barnwell  
The Daily Independent

Weapons systems testing and development have always been a cornerstone at China Lake since the installation was established by the Navy in 1943.

For 74 years, numerous systems that have become integrated into the fleet and helped give the U.S. an edge in military might were designed by China Lake's engineers and scientists and tested by the naval pilots stationed there.

The more things change, the more they stay the same, especially as China Lake's largest tenant command, Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, takes a pivotal role in developing new systems.

"We have a lot in play at China Lake right now," said NAWCWD Executive Director Joan Johnson.

NAWCWD, split between China Lake and Point Mugu in Ventura County, is the one of the single largest employers in the Indian Wells Valley and utilizes the 1.1-million-acre real estate for laboratory use, development and testing.

And it's growing, according to Johnson.

"It's going very well. As of the end of July the hiring statistics are showing not only have we hired to meet attrition — for all those who have left we have hired to backfill those who have separated — but we've also grown by about 200 employees," Johnson said.

Approximately 75 percent of the employees are at China Lake, while the rest at NAWCWD facilities in Point Mugu.

"We are expecting by the end of our fiscal year at the end of Sep-



U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY THERESA GOLDSTRAND  
**Fire Science Laboratory teammates Ross Davidson, left, and Eric Sievert, on truck, from Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division demonstrate a shipboard aviation fire emergency recently at the Carrier Deck Firefighting Test Facility, or Mini Deck, at China Lake.**

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U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY PAUL KAKERT, CTR

**Ron Pruitt, right, head of the systems assembly branch at NAWCWD China Lake, informs aviators from Carrier Air Wing 7 that some of the equipment they use has been designed using 3-D printing.**

tember that we will be at a net growth of 200. Looking forward to next year, we are expecting to grow to meet the demand of our customers,” Johnson said. “So where we saw a growth of 200 this year, I anticipate that we will meet or exceed those numbers next year.”

All that brain power is going into several projects that have made China Lake a crown jewel for the Navy’s testing programs.

Johnson named a few, including the Long Range Anti-ship Missile, or LRASM for short.

“We continue to play a significant role in the development and integration of LRASM, the long-range anti-ship missile,” Johnson said. “It’s scheduled for initial operating capability on the F-18 SuperHornet in 2019. We’ve got a strong technical team here that has been involved in everything from early development all the way through integration and testing.”

Johnson said a few weeks prior to Sept. 6, NAWCWD conducted a test out on its sea range. A production LRASM was launched from a B-1 and successfully destroyed a sea-based moving target.

“That was a significant event in demonstrating that the LRASM system is maturing and on schedule to meet its capability needs for 2019,” Johnson said.

A second project is the Solid Fuel Ramjet, or SFRJ in acronym parlance.

“The solid fuel ramjet is being developed by our engineers and scientists here at China Lake,” Johnson said. “It’s a really interesting ‘Back to the Future’ story. The SRFJ technology was first developed in the 1970s, but it didn’t advance. It was largely shelved for a number of reasons, to include a limitations in propellants. we just didn’t have propellants that were advanced enough to take advantage of what a ramjet rocket motor was intended to do.”

The SFRJ is essentially an air-breathing engine that allows a payload to travel farther and at higher speeds to hit its target. The ramjet uses forward motion to suck in oxygen, which allows more room for fuel — thus making it more fuel efficient.

**Larger fuel supply plus continuous high speed does a hard-to-hit long distance missile make**

Over the years, the Navy has managed to developed and improve solid fuel propellants that benefit the ramjet technology. In short, solid fuels are easier to pack in.

“As a result of that we are seeing significant increases in rocket motor performance, which is a much-needed capability in the Navy’s weapons arsenal,” she said.

In a tip of the hat to innovation, NAWCWD is using one technology to help develop their projects, according to Johnson.

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U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY PAUL KAKERT, CTR  
**Nick Quigley, left, an aerospace engineer at Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, updates Rep. Mac Thornberry, back right, on the ongoing efforts of the Solid Fuel Ramjet project as Rep. Kevin McCarthy takes an up-close look during their March 31 visit to China Lake. McCarthy, House of Representatives majority leader, and Thornberry, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, also saw a demo of Digital Precision Strike Suite equipment that was developed at China Lake and is currently in use by the warfighter in the field.**

NAWCWD is using 3-D printing to manufacture the supersonic inlet — essentially a nozzle — on that solid fuel ramjet. While additive manufacturing isn't a new concept to NAWCWD facilities, Johnson said that with the introduction of metals, things have been kicked into a higher gear.

"The movement into metals in terms of 3-D printing is really a game changer for us," Johnson said.

"China Lake has been applying additive manufacturing, or 3-D printing, for well over a decade," she added. "But most recently, we've expanded our capability to include 3-D printing using metals. That's significant because that enables us to rapidly prototype, test and develop components that have very complex geometries."

Johnson said NAWCWD is eyeing something that may see large gains for China Lake and NAWCWD: the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. The F-35 is meant to gradually replace the F-18 as the U.S. military's mainstay fighter.

"As the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter nears the end of its system development phase and is moving toward Navy initial operating capability, we are responding to a request from the F-35 Joint Program Office to develop in concert with the Air Force a software sustainment plan that will leverage China Lake's labs, facilities, best practice and, most of all, our experts to sustain and evolve the F-35 operational flight software throughout its life cycle," Johnson said.

The software sustainment plan is a critical component, given the F-35 is forecast to be in the Navy's fleet for 40 years. The fighter jet is perhaps the most sophisticated plane being developed to date.

"This is a big effort for NAWCWD," Johnson said  
While current operational testing of the F-35 is conducted at Edwards Air Force Base, the project utilizes NAWCWD test ranges.  
"Our intent as we talk about software sustainment is also to expand from software sustainment to systems integration, which will involve like what we do with the F-18, which is development test," Johnson said. "We still believe there is a future here at NAWCWD, where we will adopt a full life cycle integration model for the F-35."

**An essential partnership**

As one of the largest employers in the Indian Wells Valley, NAW-



U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY PAUL KAKERT, CTR  
**An aviator from Carrier Air Wing 7 inspects a 3-D printed part during a Feb. 3 tour of the applied manufacturing facility at Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division China Lake.**

CWD contributes in several ways to community partnerships.  
"Maintaining our partnership with the local community is vital because we're not just stewards of the Indian Wells Valley, almost every one who works here is a resident," Johnson said. "We have a very vested interest in making sure our community on both sides of the gate are vital."  
It's no secret: Ridgecrest would likely not exist in its current form without China Lake. The city grew around the Navy base when it relocated to its present location from Inyokern in the 1940s. Over time, the civilian workforce moved from living on the installation into the growing town.  
Continued partnership between the Navy and residents remains a top goal, especially when it benefits NAWCWD.  
"One of the highest priorities from a workforce perspective is recruiting and retention stand point," Johnson said.  
STEM — or science, technology, engineering and mathematics — plays a key part in that priority.  
"The engagements from the last school year, which includes Sierra Sands Unified School District, [Ridgecrest] Charter School, independent schools like Saint Ann and Opportunities For Learning, included a number of events," Johnson said.  
Those include two science fairs, 13 class demonstrations and pre-

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sentations, eight NAWCWD tours and the Expand Your Horizon and Young Engineers and Scientists! conferences. The EYH and YES! conferences are geared toward middle-school-aged girls and boys respectively.

“The feedback we got from both of those were resounding, and that is something we are going to continue working on,” Johnson said.

Additionally, NAWCWD held a STEM fair at Burroughs High School on March 31, 2017, in which 50 scientists and engineers spent the day engaging with high school students.

“The point to all that is that we recognize and benefitting from continued influx of STEM students coming to WD,” she said. “Obviously we can’t do our work without a good foundation of scientists and engineers. We want to continue our young to pursue a STEM career — it’s important to the IWV and to the country.”

In some ways, NAWCWD reaps the reward of that effort. “We benefit greatly from when our grads from Burroughs and other high schools in the area go off to pursue technical careers, because a number of those students do come back home,” Johnson said. “We know because we have second- and third-generation workforce members here who have family members who have been working on base for decades.”

NAWCWD and the Navy also foster partnerships with the community in other fashions.

“We participate in the Economic Outlook Conference,” Johnson said. “That’s real pivotable because it not only connects us with small business and the support contractors, it is also a opportunity to spend some quality time with community leaders and share perspectives.”

A resounding and enduring reminder of partnership is the annual Parade of 1,000 Flags. The Navy co-sponsors the event with the Ridgecrest Exchange Club, in which participants parade 1,000 flags up Ridgecrest streets and into Freedom Park every September as a way to honor and commemorate those lost in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

In 2015, NAWCWD conducted a community survey that provided information about how quality of life can be improved both on the base and in town, as well as increased collaboration.

“What it did was it opened up some important and needed conversation between community and base leaders,” Johnson said. “It was so valuable that we are preparing to send out another survey later this calendar year.”

**Priorities**

When it comes to priorities, Johnson said those of NAWCWD are clear: the warfighter.

“The warfighter’s priorities are our priorities, and the need for our capabilities, which include our labs, our ranges, facilities and our people, just continues to intensify,” Johnson said.

In addition to increased demand from its customers, NAWCWD is leveraging funds provided through the National Defense Authorization Act, Section 219, which is allocated to defense labs and applied to four areas. The NDAA is the nation’s defense spending, passed in Congress every year.

Those four areas are innovative basic and applied research that supports military missions; transition of technology into operational use to the fleet; workforce development specifically as it pertains to

scientific and engineering expertise; and revitalization, recapitalization and/or minor construction of laboratory infrastructure.

“We can invest that money that is appropriated to the [NDAA] to any of those areas,” Johnson said. “In the case of NAWCWD in [Fiscal Year 20]18, we are investing in all four. Our finances in FY 18 are doubling compared to FY 17. That is significant because that allocates an additional \$15-plus million.”

That money is focused on five warfighter imperatives, outcome focused activities, driven by known fleet priorities and gaps and intersect “the sweet spot of what NAWCWD does well, and what is really central to our mission and our capabilities.”

Those five imperatives are Airwing Integration and Interoperability, heterogeneous systems, next generation electronic warfare, future weapons capabilities, and combat ID and targeting.

“The funds we are leveraging are really to do hands-on work to accelerate capabilities to the fleet, and to engage and train a workforce,” Johnson said. “That’s a real enabler for us.”

**Tackling challenges through improvisation**

One challenge is that a large segment of the workforce is eligible for retirement over the next few years. Johnson said that doesn’t come as a surprise and something NAWCWD has tracked.

“We have been actively mitigating the impact through a combination of aggressive hiring, especially the last 10 years,” Johnson said. “Our numbers have grown year after year over the past 10 years, and a significant portion of those new hires are in the STEM field.”

NAWCWD has invested more funds into in house training, both in advanced degrees and in specific training and core skill areas.

“One of the most important things is that we leverage funds to do hands on work, where we pair a seasoned expert with a new hire so that knowledge transfer is accelerated in critical skills areas,” Johnson said. “We’ve been doing that because we know we are losing a lot of expertise as people retire.”

She added the idea began with former NAWCWD executive director Scott O’Neil. WD has been very deliberate in identifying hands on warfighter relevant projects.

“Another tool in our tool box is we can rehire those experts after they retire, so when these men and women come back as rehired annuitants, their primary duty is to mentor new employees with the purpose of passing on lessons learned and expertise to the next generation.

Johnson emphasized a point made by Adm. John Richardson, Chief of Naval Operations.

“For the first time in nearly 25 years, the United States is facing a return to great power competition,” Johnson said. “China and Russia both have advanced their military capabilities to act as global powers, and we are all watching the evolving threat unfold in North Korea. As the CNO said, we are in a winner take all environment ... there is no second place.”

Key to ensuring dominance is the work at NAWCWD, according to Johnson. “We are here to ensure the United States and our military remain No. 1. That’s really the primary mission of NAWCWD, and the bottom line for us is if the work we are doing is not making our naval forces more lethal, we’re going to stop doing it.” ♦



A display of flames dancing to musical impulses led by Dr. Lee Cambrea, right, and Paul Goodman, NAWCWD chemists, fires up students from Trona Elementary School during an April 6 tour of Michelson Laboratory at China Lake.

U.S. NAVY PHOTO BY PAUL KAKERT, CTR

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U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO BY  
CHRISTOPHER OKULA  
**Brig. Gen. Carl Schaefer, 412th Test Wing commander, takes questions from the audience towards the end of one his commander's calls held Aug. 23 in the base theater.**

# Innovation, being ‘agile, ready, right,’ key to success at Edwards AFB

**By Kenji Thuloweit**  
412th Test Wing Public Affairs

Being “agile, ready and right” is the key to success for the Air Force’s premier test center according to Brig. Gen. Carl Schaefer, 412th Test Wing commander, who held a commander’s call Aug. 23.

Two sessions were held at the base theater to update the Edwards workforce on dozens of topics that began with highlighting the many test and base milestones achieved so far in 2017.

After inviting everyone on base to the upcoming 70th Anniversary of Supersonic Flight events on Oct. 13 and 14, Schaefer discussed the base’s priorities and fiscal year 2018 strategic plan.

The general said that Edwards AFB’s priorities are in line with the secretary of the Air Force’s priorities, which include restoring readiness and to conduct cost-effective modernization.

“This is us, we are cost-effective modernization,” said Schaefer. “We’re a huge part of that. Every new aircraft program basically comes through Edwards Air Force Base and that’s what you’re supporting. All eyes are on Edwards to continue to produce the amazing mission that we do day in and day out, and you are doing a fantastic job.”

Other priorities for Edwards and the Air Force mentioned were driving innovation, strengthening alliances and continuing to care for Airmen and their families. All of which Schaefer says Edwards will continue to do.

The general then went over key points in the test wing’s strategic action plan for fiscal year 2018.

“The vision didn’t change, we want to be the world leader in developmental test and evaluation — agile, ready and right,” Schaefer said.

He emphasized the Edwards mission, which is to test and evaluate weapon systems to deliver war-winning combat capabilities.

“Our product is information so that decision makers can make decisions off what we say about weapons systems for the warfighter. So agile, ready and right, that’s our vision. If we’re agile, ready and right, I’m positive we’ll be the world leader in developmental test and evaluation.”

Executing the test mission and exceeding customer expectations were also underlined for the upcoming fiscal year.

Schaefer reminded Team Edwards to continue to innovate. He has set aside funds to nurture innovative ideas that can potentially make processes better or more efficient. Three guest speakers were brought on stage to briefly discuss their innovation success stories such as the remotely piloted parachute system and a possible enhancement to the F-22 RVR system.

Other topics Schaefer touched on are an upcoming wing climate assessment; curbing some additional duty requirements; and the wing’s effort to speed up the hiring of government civilian workers.

Schaefer also stressed the need to be safe both on and off duty, and to use the Airmen Against Drunk Driving program if needed by calling 277-AADD (2233).

Before taking questions at the end, Schaefer introduced the new 412th TW interim command chief, Chief Master Sgt. Roosevelt Jones. Jones went over subjects effecting enlisted Airmen such as new professional military education eligibility and the new blended retirement system. Jones is a veteran of numerous combat deployments and comes into his new position from the 412th Maintenance Group where he still serves as the group superintendent. ♦

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# Shape of the city: What to expect in the next year in Ridgecrest



JESSICA WESTON/DAILY INDEPENDENT  
**Acting Ridgecrest Police Chief Jed McLaughlin speaks at the Ridgecrest City Council meeting Sept. 6, as former Ridgecrest Police Chief and current interim City Manager Ron Strand looks on.**

**By Jessica Weston**  
The Daily Independent

The city of Ridgecrest is undergoing a state of change. The current year has seen a significant turnover in top management. Chief of Police Ron Strand stepped up to fill the top position on an interim basis after former City Manager Dennis Speer stepped down from the job in July.

Speer is still the head of the Public Works Department, although he is expected to retire around the end of the year. Acting Police Chief Jed McLaughlin, meanwhile, is in charge of RPD, while Tess Sloan is the new interim Director of Finance, and Phen “Pen” Panpradith is the new Economic & Community Development Manager. Also onboard is a new associate planner, Pamela Contreras.

### Economic Development: a team approach

With the turnover in staff comes a renewed outlook for the city, particularly in the key area of economic development. The Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce is also under new leadership. Suzette Caufield recently took over as Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce CEO executive director, and Scott O’Neil is at the helm of the Indian Wells Valley Economic Development Corporation as executive director.

A general goal is for all the groups to work together, helping each other achieve the common goal of economic development for the area. According to Strand, one of Panpradith’s responsibilities will be to coordinate the various groups working on economic development in Ridgecrest.

O’Neil said he is hopeful about the Chamber of Commerce, the city and the EDC working as a team.

“I think that we can actually start building,” O’Neil said. “We are going to bring the RACVB [Ridgecrest Area Convention and Vacation Bureau] into it and see if we can’t start building some momentum right there and get everybody working together.”

Panpradith will also continue the work of her predecessor, Gary Parsons, in trying to attract new businesses to the area, according to Strand. “Pen will continue targeted recruitment for retail businesses. Some of the things we are looking at are retail,” Strand said.

City staff is mum on details, but are reportedly talks are in process with several recognizable names that may be interested in setting up shop here.

### Expediting development

Panpradith will also take charge of the Planning Commission at the staff level, with the help of Contreras.

This work is particularly important because of a potential housing shortage in Ridgecrest. As hiring increases on the base, the city of



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Ridgecrest is gearing up to make developing new projects easier. Strand told the Daily Independent that an important order of business is to streamline and expedite the permitting and development process.

"If somebody wants to come in and build some tract homes, how are we going to be able to get them in and get them educated on what our requirements are, get it through the process as quickly as we possibly can?" he asked.

One idea is to possibly require developers to hire their own planners, thus avoiding a backlog at the city's Planning Department. Strand said a resolution is in the works to possibly require developers to hire their own planners as part of project requirements. He added that the resolution will likely be presented to the Ridgecrest City Council in the near future.

"A lot of it will depend upon our workload. If we get bogged down we may require some developers to hire contract planners to go work for us to get the stuff through. We are still working on the final details of that," he said.

"If we do have a project that comes into town that is beyond the capability of what we currently have, we would have the authority to say, 'OK, we are going to require you to hire a planner from our list that will work through us to get through the process,'" Strand said.

The city would present developers with a list of planners to choose from. The benefit to the developer would presumably be an expedited process from their end as well.

Of course, all of this is related to the need for new developments. Former Economic Development Manager Gary Parsons noted a surge of development activity lately, and with rumored jobs headed for the base, the city may be stretched to provide appropriate housing.

"The ultimate thing would be for us to have a planner onboard where we could get through this stuff in a timely manner, but if it turns out that we are backlogged, we would have the ability to require it," Strand

said. "How much we will use it, I don't know."

Strand said the city has also reached out to Kern County, which has volunteered to step in and advise the city on streamlining procedures.

**City budget/quality of life**

The Ridgecrest city budget is small compared to other cities of comparable size, partially due to the proximity to the base.

"When your No. 1 employer does not pay direct taxes, they pay indirect taxes through providing good salaries for most of the people that live in the community. Our No. 1 revenue source is still sales tax, so we are obviously looking at bringing additional retail, then the community will benefit," Strand said.

One idea being floated to increase revenue is a benefit assessment for parks and recreation.

Improvements on Upjohn Park and Pearson Park are under way, but Strand said there is more work to be done. "A lot of it has to do with quality of life. I think having eventually a benefit assessment might help us get Pinney Pool reopened and put us in a position where we never allow our facilities to get to the point where they are not repairable and have to be closed."

The EDC, meanwhile, continues work on plans for an Aquatic Center, another quality-of-life project. Funding sources have not yet been identified, but thus far the community has been enthusiastic about the potential project.

O'Neil also noted that he is also hopeful that innovations in public-private partnerships in the area and a paradigm shift in local business may help generate a bigger tax base for Ridgecrest.

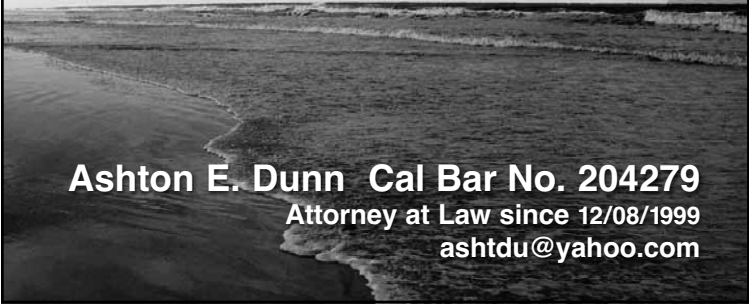
(For more on both of these topics, see related story on the EDC on Page 13.)

Meanwhile, possible improvements to transportation and infrastructure loom on the horizon. California's Road Repair and Accountability Act of 2017, also known as SB1, may well provide some funding that will

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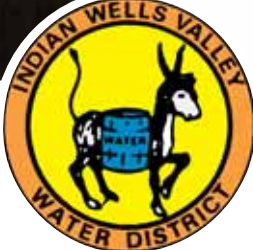
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help the Ridgecrest area, but as of press time it was unclear how this would play out.

Also in progress is a new Inyokern Hub station project, which will hook up with Ridgecrest city transit. This project is being partially by the California Transit Security Grant Program.

**Public Safety**

A rash of homicides in the larger area during the past months have had people asking if Ridgecrest is becoming a more dangerous place to

live. As of early September, at least three homicides had occurred in the county area outlying Ridgecrest in 2017.

"I couldn't provide a specific reason why they occurred," Strand said. "They weren't our homicides [did not occur within Ridgecrest city limits]." Strand said the last homicide to occur within Ridgecrest city limits was in 2015 and there have been none since.

Strand (who was formerly the Ridgecrest Chief of Police) said the uptick in public safety issues is much more likely to be the result of changes in state laws than anything specific going on in Ridgecrest.

He emphasized that Ridgecrest is still "a very safe community," but said. "I think that they are going to find that the crime trends are going to continue to go up."

"I think a lot of what we are seeing throughout the state right now has a lot to do with the change in the justice system. Property crimes, the quasi-legalization of the hard narcotics has had an effect. It was predictable, the decisions you make three or four years ago come to fruition."

"People with hard narcotics are just being cited," he said, due to changes in the law.

"Prop 47 (reduced sentences for some crimes) was extremely difficult to adapt to, because that basically all the tools we had that we used to control the people that were drug abusers in our community, which are the ones that commit the majority of our property crimes.

"A lot of the ability to lock them up and get them off the streets for a period of time for them to sober up went away, and I think that has been a significant issue that we've had to deal with."

Adding to the problem is lack of adequate funding for drug treatments.

"So now you have people that are out of jail that are committing crimes that are addicted to drugs, there's no way to provide them treatment so before our whole system was based upon, we dealt with it through incarceration."

Strand said he is a believer in early intervention for people with substance abuse problems.

"So now you don't have incarceration, but you don't have what we should have which is some way of treating, finding a way of getting these folks off of drugs. My belief is we should be intervening a lot sooner in the drug addiction cycle. And that will be less costly down the road.

"But our system has always been very reactive and not proactive. And the only reactive thing that we had at the time for controlling drug addicts that committed crimes was jail," Strand said.

"And now that the jail component is out of the equation, we still don't have the drug intervention."

Strand said the possibility of a jail sentence can be motivational to getting people off drugs.

"The problem with treatment programs is you can have all the treatment programs in the world, but people have to attend the programs. Sometimes you have to have with addicts the carrot and the stick. You have to have 'if you go to the program, here's the carrot,' if you don't go, here's the stick.

"There has to be consequences if you don't go to the program.

"Sometimes it takes people two or three times to go through the program before they are finally they are able to address whatever issues are causing them to use the drugs in the first place.

"It's not as easy as one would think; it's very complex." ❖



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# New leadership, new goals in econ development

By Jessica Weston  
The Daily Independent

The Indian Wells Valley Economic Development Corporation has new leadership, new goals and an eye on the future growth of the valley, including plans to coordinate with other local groups to help the community grow.

IWV EDC Executive Director Scott O’Neil sat down with the Daily Independent recently to talk about his plans and how the EDC hopes to interact with other groups for the betterment of the IWV economy.

## An economic development cooperative

O’Neil said the EDC hopes to work in conjunction with the Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce, the city and the possibly the Ridgecrest Area Visitors Convention Bureau to form a sort of economic development cooperative.

“We are really going to work hard to form a cooperative between what the city is trying to do with economic development, what the council is doing, and where we are going with the EDC,” O’Neil said.

“The idea is that if we collaborate we can pool resources and spread



JESSICA WESTON/DAILY INDEPENDENT  
IWV EDC executive director Scott O’Neil talks Aquatic Center plans and progress with the Ridgecrest Exchange Club at their meeting in May.

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out the work that needs to be done as far as pushing forward some of these ideas, and I think we will have a lot better success in trying to conquer ... that to me is a great new development.”

O’Neil said he hopes the synergy of new leadership in city staff and at the Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce will help make it all work. “We’ve got new leadership in all three of these areas, and we have all made a commitment to each of the organizations that we are going to try to share information and work together and try to support each others’ initiatives and try to move the ball forward.”

He said he is looking forward to working with the city’s new new Economic and Community Development Manager, Phen Panpradith, and new Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Suzette Caufield, as well as “working hard to get the base more engaged.”

Specific goals

As for specific goals, he said, the EDC is focusing on supporting bringing commercial businesses into town, supporting construction for housing for new employees and trying to work on quality of life issues supporting recruiting and retention such as the proposed aquatic center.

In addition, O’Neil said, the group has ideas for improving the local industrial base and also getting more productivity out of the local defense dollar by way of investigating public-private partnerships.

Like those in the city staff, O’Neil said he is concerned about the housing market in Ridgecrest. A priority is encouraging new apartment development and improving single family residential housing, he said.

“That’s a big deal because housing is saturated and the base continues to hire.”

The city also has plans to expedite the development process at the Planning Department level. (For more on this topic, see related story

on Page 10.) O’Neil also said he is hopeful the EDC may be able to assist the city in pulling together marketing and informational material about Ridgecrest demographics in order to attract retail and food franchises to the area.

“There is a lot of marketing and informational material available about our demographics and income levels,” he said. “We are trying to put together more of a package and a strategy about how we need to approach people like franchisers and people like that to understand the uniqueness of our community.”

Specifically, he said, the goal is to try present Ridgecrest as a special market, in which spending is not necessarily predictable based on population alone. O’Neil pointed out that the local population has a strong payroll and a high disposable income, and a large number of travelers spend money while here. The hope is to put all of this together and find a new way to present the area to potential investors.

“We need to figure out how to capture and forecast that better,” he said.

Aquatic Center/quality of life

The EDC has been working on plans for an Aquatic Center, tentatively to be located on China Lake Boulevard. O’Neil said the plans are “moving along nicely.” The plans play into the quality of life component of economic development because there is general consensus that an family attraction such as an aquatic center would help greatly with job recruitment and retention for the area.

In addition, the center could be used for local high school and college swim teams, out-of-town tournaments, and as a general inducement to visit the area.

“We are hoping it will also put another corner on why people from the Eastern Kern want to come here to shop on weekends,” O’Neil



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said.

The EDC is in the process of gauging community wants and needs for the center, with the help of consultant Counsilman-Hunsaker.

“One thing that we have really settled on and put an exclamation point on,” he said, “we are going to have a facility that will have a water park. The scope of the water park is undefined.”

Other planned features include an outdoor competitive pool that can also be used for recreation, competitive swimming and diving. There will also be an indoor lap pool for educational purposes, therapy and aquatics, and year-round swim lessons.

The current plan is a compromise of two earlier plans and was arrived at with lots of input from local groups, the public, and several committees. The group has already held two public forums to solicit local feedback and a third will be planned soon.

The focus at this point is looking at the community requirements and focusing in on “what facility do we want and what facility can we really afford,” he said. “We are starting to shift gears into a little bit more of a marketing role, talk to more groups and broader community at large.

“I’ll be out starting to talk to people more about what we will be envisioning as far as the facility goes, and start laying out the framework for how we can fund the construction. Once we settle in on what the facility is going to have, then really hone in on what it is going to cost to operate so that we can make sure that whatever we build is going to be sustainable into the future. So we are working multiple fronts.”

O’Neil said the group is researching grants to leverage available monies into being able to support the facility in an ongoing way.

“I think we can use grants to get things kick-started,” he said. Longer-range plans will include how to generate funds required to run the facility.

O’Neil said he envisions using “a mixture I think of public and private monies, local and regional industrial partners ... my goal is to get

as many donations from major corporations that we can and minimize the money that we’ve got to raise.”

O’Neil said that although the aquatic center is potentially an expensive proposition, he thinks it is feasible.

“It is going to be an expensive venue, but the more I get involved in this the more I think we can do it. My goal over the fall months is to increase the dialog and build the momentum so the public sees this as real and the city sees it as real.”

Public input so far has been almost universally positive, with much verbal support for the project. O’Neil said he is hopeful this will continue.

“The community is going to step up and make some sort of an investment and that is going to be dependent on how much we can get out of other means.”

On a related note, O’Neil said the EDC’s Sports Commission is also being very aggressive in trying to attract sports competitions to local venues, “weekend events that bring money into community” as well as “working very closely with competitive groups in town and local schools.”

**Other plans**

O’Neil is also enthusiastic about another economic development idea. He said it is too soon to go into details, but he said it is work that would complement the base using the type of public-private partnership the current administration is encouraging, similar to what Elon Musk is doing with SpaceX.

O’Neil said such an idea would be a perfect fit for Ridgecrest, particularly given the local brain trust available to support and advise. If successful, it could also help generate a bigger tax base for Ridgecrest, he said.

“I think we can set a new paradigm for how we approach our business and I think we can do that right here in Ridgecrest,” he said. ♦

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From left, Quality Analyst Hadley Sauers-Ford, Business Analyst June Brown, Medical Director Scott Christensen and Manager Kay Harse from the UC Davis Cancer Care Network; RRH CEO Jim Suver, Chairman of the RRH Board of Directors Dana Lyons; and Mayor Peggy Breen announce the RRH/UC Davis affiliation at a press conference in January at RRH.

# RRH: New horizons for healthcare

By Jessica Weston  
The Daily Independent

As the year draws to a close, Ridgecrest Regional Hospital is preparing for the future with a little help from Kern County. Look for the new county Crisis Stabilization Unit, new developments in the oncology affiliation with UC Davis, and — eventually — a new Emergency Room and a new helipad.



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### Crisis Stabilization Unit

As this goes to press, the new Crisis Stabilization Unit is nearing completion. According to RRH CEO Jim Suver, the hope is that the CSU will be completed by the first week of November. An Open House for the facility is scheduled Oct. 25 from 10:30 a.m. to noon at 1141 N. Chelsea St. in Ridgecrest.

The new facility, located behind Taco Bell, fills a “huge” community need according to Suver. It is intended to fill a long-standing gap in mental health services, as well as 24-hour mental health crisis support. Suver said that such a facility was one of the top “needs” listed in a community health needs assessment at the hospital last year.

“This is a total first for us,” he said.

The facility will provide crisis care intervention and treatment. The center will be primarily for the treatment of mental health issues. “It will be for people who don’t have medical problems but have mental health problems,” Suver said.

He said people will enter the CSU in one of three ways. They can be transferred from the hospital’s ER, once medically cleared. In the case of known, long-standing mental health problems, they may be brought directly in by local law enforcement. Or, “if someone is having a crisis they can go there directly themselves,” Suver said.

The facility will be open 24 hours a day and, according to Suver, will take all patients regardless of insurance. The facility will have eight adult beds and four pediatric beds and is designed to hold patients 23 hours. They will either be potentially referred to Kern County Mental Health in Bakersfield, or discharged home.

The CSU represents a partnership between Kern County and RRH. It is funded by a grant and will be operated by the Kern County mental health division. RRH contributed the land and improvements as part of the grant requirements. Suver said the center will at any given time have about six staff present.

As of mid September, Suver said the building is essentially complete, with only site improvements such as parking, lighting and block fence work to be done.

Suver said the partnership between RRH and the county stands to benefit the community.

“We are just grateful Kern County mental health department has been fantastic to work with,” he said, “and we are just glad to have the service in our community.”

Suver said another priority is recruiting psychiatrists for both children and adults to complement the CSU by providing for longer term therapy.

### Oncology affiliation with UC Davis Medical

The ongoing oncology affiliation between RRH and UC Davis Cancer Care Network is also poised to provide increased services to people in the local area.

Suver said the hospital has recruited an oncologist, who will also have academic privileges at UC Davis School of Medicine.

In addition, nursing and pharmaceutical staff have been trained at UC Davis. He said the plan is for chemotherapy to be available at RRH the second week of November.





JESSICA WESTON/DAILY INDEPENDENT

**Construction is taking place on the new Critical Services Unit, which should be completed by the first week in November. An Open House for the facility is scheduled Oct. 25 from 10:30 a.m. to noon at 1141 N. Chelsea St. in Ridgecrest.**

“It is fully a Ridgecrest-based program,” Suver said. This program, too, fills an oft-cited medical need. Suver said it was the number five “need” on a community health needs assessment done by the hospital a few years back.

Patient referrals will come from other doctors as well as self-selection of patients, he said. The plan is for the program to eventually offer medical oncology while determining the community need, before eventually offering services such as radiology.

For those who don’t know, oncologists can diagnose cancer themselves as well as accept referrals from other doctors.

“Most oncologists are actually hematologists,” he said. “The primary care [physician] may know there is something wrong but the oncologist can pinpoint the type of cancer.” Oncologists also refer patients to general surgeons for cancer surgery.

“We are really excited,” said Suver of the potential of this affiliation.

**New Emergency Room**

A new ER for the hospital is also on the horizon, but maybe not for three years or so.

According to Suver, plans for the ER are still in progress, but it is going through a lengthy approval process at the state level.

“We are halfway through the 18-month process,” he said.

State approval is only one hurdle to be cleared for the new ER. The ER (and new helipad) will go in where the existing Southern Sierra Medical Clinic offices are.

“We are relocating our South Medical Plaza to across the street to the Sydner office building,” he said.

Once the Southern Sierra office is taken down, a construction period will be required to build the new ER.

In all, it may be several years before the new ER is in service.

“It’s a multiple-year thing, maybe a three-year thing because there’s licensing from the state [required].”

**Automated Breast Ultrasound Unit**

For over a year, the RRH Development Foundation conducted fundraising to purchase an automated breast ultrasound unit, which is now housed in the Women’s Imaging Department of the hospital.

Ridgecrest Regional Hospital is now one of only 139 hospitals across the country to install this FDA-approved state-of-the-art screening ultrasound, putting the Women’s Imaging Department at Ridgecrest Regional Hospital ahead of the curve in terms of advanced imaging equipment according to a hospital press release.

**New policies?**

Suver also weighed in on the hospital’s challenge to keep up with the seemingly endless healthcare changes imposed by the government.

“I think our biggest goal in 2018 is to ensure we are financially stable and can ensure we will survive any changes that are made at the state or the federal level,” he said.

How does he see the hospital being influenced by healthcare changes at the national level?

“I think the direction we are thinking right now is they are going to

get really serious about moving everyone to Medicare as part of single-payer system. That’s one of the ideas that is starting to gain some traction,” he said. He added that RRH is trying to prepare for this possibility, which may unfortunately result in decreased reimbursement and less freedom of choice in medical care for some residents.

Overall, though, Suver said he is optimistic about RRH’s future.

“I think we have enough on our plate with these construction projects. Right now we are feeling pretty good about that.” ♦

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The IWV Ground Authority board of directors. From left: Non-voting member Commander Brian Longbottom of NAWS China Lake, non-voting member Ryan Klausch from Bureau of Land Management, Peggy Breeden from the city of Ridgecrest, Peter Brown from IWV Water District, Mick Gleason from Kern County, Bob Page from San Bernardino County, and Bob Harrington from Inyo County.

# The future of water in the desert

By Michael Smit  
Daily Independent

Water is the issue when trying to make a life in the desert. Any other topic or political division needs to take a backseat when a desert community needs to talk about water. And for Ridgecrest and the rest of Indian Wells Valley, that time has come.

Various forces of water sustainability came to a head at March’s Indian Wells Valley Water District board of directors meeting as the directors and members of the public discussed recent water sustainability legislation. During public comment, member of the public Raymond Kelso said, “We must protect our water for our children and our children’s children.”

It’s a sentiment that has universal support, yet it’s easier said than done in a desert region like the Indian Wells Valley. IWV is one of the driest regions in North America. It has no reliable surface water, and Indian Wells Valley Water District — the primary public water supplier — relies 100 percent on the IWV groundwater basin to supply water.

Then the need to find water sustainability became immediate when California state passed the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) of 2014, requiring local agencies to form Groundwater Sustainability Agencies (GSA) tasked with making a Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP).

The California Department of Water Resources website lists roughly 500 groundwater basins in the state. Of those, it lists 21 that the state has determined to be in critical overdraft. The IWV groundwater basin is one of those critically overdrafted basins.

A groundwater basin is essentially an open area underground that has stored up water over an immense amount of time. If more water is pumped out of that basin than naturally goes back into it each year, that basin is in overdraft and its water storage will begin shrinking over time.

So what does it mean for a basin to be in critical overdraft? SGMA defines it as, “When continuation of present water management practices would probably result in significant adverse overdraft-related environmental, social, or economic impacts.”

In the case of the IWV basin, studies show that we pump water out

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of the IWV basin at a rate of somewhere between three to five times faster than it naturally recharges, causing the water levels to drop at a rate of roughly a foot per year. While the IWV basin still has enough water in storage to keep going for decades, it is a finite resource and that resource is dropping.

After SGMA passed in 2014, immediately public agencies with a stake in IWV basin water got together to form a GSA to bring that basin into sustainability. The agencies with voting power on the GSA are San Bernardino County, Inyo County, Kern County, the city of Ridgecrest, and the IWVWD. Non-voting members on the GSA are Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake and the Bureau of Land Management.

The GSA's name is the Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority (IWVGA). It is an entirely new government agency in the area. And considering that it will regulate groundwater in the desert, it's likely to become among the most powerful government agencies in the area.

For the last few years, IWVGA has primarily been building a legal foundation as it wrestled with how to form a brand new government agency. But by now, the necessary pieces are in place. IWVGA now has committees to handle policy and technical aspects, it has a board of directors to vote on action, and it recently hired a Water Resources Manager (WRM) in Stetson Engineers Inc.

The WRM was likely the last cog in the wheel to get IWVGA into full working order. And it's a very central cog at that according to the IWVGA's bylaws, which state that the WRM will be responsible for much of the heavy lifting in crafting the GSP and making sure it complies with state law.

Kern County First District Supervisor and current IWVGA chairman Mick Gleason told the Daily Independent in an interview on Sept. 11, "The Water Resources Manager will be responsible for developing the GSP."

Gleason explained that Stetson will likely go about drafting the GSP by coordinating with the IWVGA's Policy Advisory Committee and the Technical Advisory Committee, as well as working to understand the IWVGA board and the desires of the IWV community.

Stetson Engineers Inc. has a good reputation in the water management industry, and they faced tough competition in the hiring process to become the WRM. All seem to agree that the firm is highly qualified for the project.

Steve Johnson, president of Stetson Engineers Inc. and front man for the WRM, said, "It's all water resources and water supply. That's all we do."

One aspect of IWVGA that will change in 2018 is that it will experience its first rotation in chairperson. Every year, IWVGA will rotate the chair position between Kern County, the city of Ridgecrest, and the Water District, because those are the three agencies on the board of directors that have the most stake in IWV water. The city of Ridgecrest will take the chair position in 2018, and the Water District in 2019.

Ridgecrest Mayor Peggy Breeden is the city council's representative on IWVGA, so she will become the IWVGA board's chairperson in 2018. However, she doesn't see it as a significant change.

"I don't see any great changes because I think we've been led admirably," she told the Daily Independent on Sept. 5. She referred to the leadership that Gleason and Kern county have offered up to this point, which has brought the IWVGA together and begin working on an answer to the new SGMA regulation.

She added that Kern County provided the service of its staff throughout IWVGA's history, but she believes that's mostly because IWVGA was still finding its footing. For example, Kern County Chief Administrative Officer Alan Christensen has been serving as the IWVGA's general manager. However, Johnson will likely take over that role now that he and his firm have been hired as the WRM.

Breeden also noted that she hoped to help the state understand that IWV is in a unique situation concerning its water. She said that while the IWV basin is in overdraft, there's still a large storage of water she hopes we can continue to use to promote economic growth in the area.

"I want to go to them and say that we are unique. We are one of the very few areas in this state that have over a million acre footage of water in storage," she said. "I want them to adapt so that we can use that storage so we don't have to say we can't do things, but to say that water in storage is part of our economic development plan."

It's uncertain at this point what the state will allow under SGMA and new groundwater regulation. The letter of the law suggests that the state will only allow the region to pump as much water from the basin as is naturally recharged, which again is roughly 3 to 5 times lower than how much water is currently pumped from the basin. Many, including Breeden, hope that the state could make an exception to allow some of the basin's immense water storage to continue to see use.

Regardless, any sort of GSP in an arid region like IWV is likely to include importing water from outside the region. This means not only purchasing that water on an ongoing basis, but also building the infrastructure to bring that water into the region. In short, water will cost more.

"You're going to use less [water], and you're going to pay more," Gleason said.

He acknowledged that not all of the decisions the IWVGA makes will be popular, and in fact some are likely to be very unpopular. At

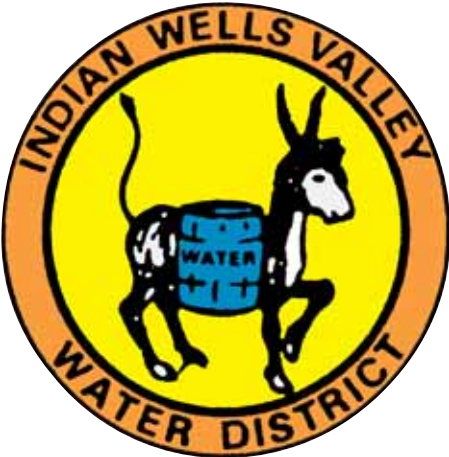
the moment, the public has seemed fairly uninterested in this new water regulation government agency, but Gleason suspects they'll suddenly become very interested when their water starts costing more.

Still, though the process may be unpopular, he believes it's overall for the best. He said that in order to maintain economic growth and ensure that NAWS China Lake — the area's top employer — continues operations in the area, they had to prove to businesses that they have the ability to supply water for decades to come.

If companies think the area is going to run dry in 20 years then they're not going to invest the resources to start or continue a business in the area, Gleason said.

It's uncertain when these new fees will come into play. IWVGA is currently funded through contributions from its members and from state level grants. Currently, IWVGA's primary goal is in applying for more grants to continue its funding through the next couple years.

However, these grants are provide temporary funding for a permanent government agency. Someday in a few years, water will likely start to cost more as we all pitch in to meet state regulation, ensure continued economic growth, and protect our water for our children and our children's children. ❖



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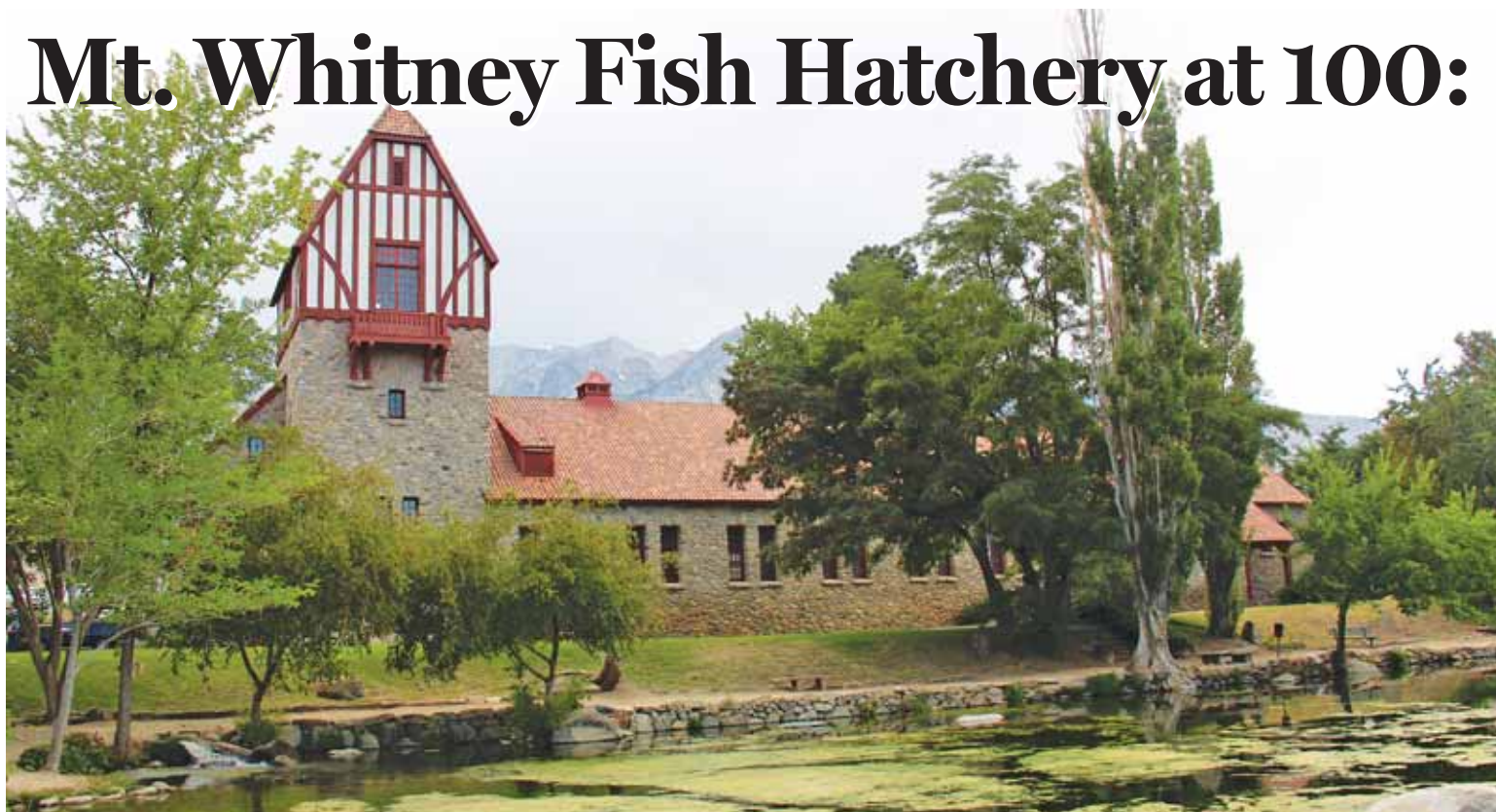


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# Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery at 100:



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# They don't build 'em like this anymore

By Michael Smit  
The Daily Independent

I heard it about five times from different people within my first hour at the Mount Whitney Fish Hatchery's 100 year anniversary. With hands on hips and necks craned up to look at the rock and mortar building set against the backdrop of the Sierra Nevada mountains, they'd say, "They don't make buildings like this anymore."

They're right. The Mount Whitney Fish Hatchery is from an era from which few Mojave Desert buildings remain, and it was built with techniques even older. Each rock that forms its walls was taken from the surrounding Sierras and placed by hand into the position it still rests in.

As you walk into the Mount Whitney Fish Hatchery, through the backroom and past the troughs of young golden trout, the building opens into a historical center that feels like a miniature museum featuring original documents and informative plaques.

One plaque states that when the hatchery's construction completed, it was the largest hatchery in the state and it still reigns to this day as the most beautiful hatchery in the state. That last line may be the hatchery's curators taking liberties by making an opinion statement, but it's doubtful anyone would refute it. The Mount Whitney Fish Hatchery of Independence, Calif., is an icon of Inyo County, made only more impressive by the number of years it's stood. It celebrated its 100-year anniversary in 2017.

As they began making blueprints for the building in 1915, California State Fish and Game Commission commissioner M.J. Connell



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT

**ABOVE:** Young golden trout swim in display troughs at the hatchery in Independence, Calif. Water is constantly filtering through, keeping it fresh and chilly, which is for keeping the average trout comfortable.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** When the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery was built in 1916, the commissioner of the Department of Fish and Game told the crew to, "Design a building that would match the mountains, last forever, and be a monument for all time."



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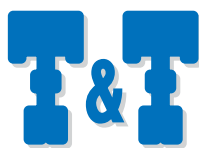
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**Two boys feed the golden trout in Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery’s display pond during the 100 year anniversary celebration. The Hatchery, owned by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, still has a small scale fish replenishment project, but now primarily supports tourism with its interpretive displays and historical significance. Plans to return to full hatchery services in the future are possible, but uncertain.**

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told them to “design a building that would match the mountains, last forever, and be a monument for all time.” The hatchery has since gone through the most severe of tests, but it has lived up to that lofty goal.

The Commission, now known as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, began construction on the hatchery after the people of Independence raised \$1,500 in 1916 to purchase the property, which they then donated to the state for the purpose of building the hatchery in their small town.

When the construction began, Connell — who was always good for a quote — told the construction workers, “I want no delays, no ifs and buts. We have the money, now go and give me the best hatchery in the world.”

And so they did. A plaque that now sits in the hatchery’s historical section shows a picture of the building shortly after its completion with a caption that reads, “1917 total cost \$60,000. On time, on budget.”

Friends of the Mount Whitney Fish Hatchery board president Ted Pedersen explained that this historic building’s future has not always been certain. The Friends formed in 1996 when the state began talking about closing the hatchery. They rallied support from around the state to maintain the property and keep the hatchery running.

Pedersen said that the hatchery’s future was again in jeopardy when the surrounding area suf-



**A car from 1916 stands outside the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery, a building from 1916.**

MICHAEL SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT

fered catastrophic fires in 2007 followed by floods and massive mudslides in 2008. The mudslides hit the grounds particularly hard, destroying infrastructure and filling in the hatchery’s beautiful display pool. However, the hatchery building itself stood through it all.

“They estimated it would be something like \$10 million to reinstate the property, and they couldn’t do it,” Pedersen said. The state ceased hatchery operations after the mudslide. Once again, the Friends stepped up. They rallied volunteers together to restore the property.

“It took a lot of blood, sweat, and tears,” Pedersen said. It called for over a year of volunteer labor, but they did it. In 2009, the Friends announced the hatchery grounds were open again, with display pond restored, display golden trout troughs in place, and the histori-

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cal section of the building ready for visitors.

It's unlikely that the Mount Whitney Fish Hatchery will ever return to fully functioning hatchery. It would be expensive, and other hatcheries have been built to take over production. However, Mount Whitney Fish Hatchery has the unique mix of historical value and scenic beauty.

As our interview came to an end outside the hatchery, Pedersen looked up with hands on hips and neck craned up, and said, "I don't want this to go away. I want to see another hundred years. They don't build things like this anymore."

❖



MICHAEL SMIT  
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**The Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery, built in 1916. It sits just a few minutes off the 395 Highway, just north of Independence.**

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The crowd either dines or waits in lines at the 100 year anniversary for the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery in Independence, Calif. The Friends of the Mt. Whitney Fish Hatchery hosted the luncheon, which served as both a fundraiser and a celebration.

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# Cerro Coso Community College: After 45 years, securing the future

Plato once said, “The direction in which education starts a man will determine his future in life.” For the past 45 years Cerro Coso Community College has been changing lives by providing quality, yet affordable educational opportunities to the communities it serves.

In the midst of expansion and renewal, the 2017-2018 academic school year marks the 45th anniversary of the college, and the 20th anniversary of CC Online. A leader in online education, the college has been offering online classes since 1997 to provide students with a flexible alternative to classroom education using contemporary information technology. While certainly not the form of “online learning” that stands up to the web learning of today, it was the beginning of enhanced distance learning and the utilization of computer resources for educational purposes. The first of its kind in California, CC Online has been recognized and imitated by many community colleges. Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Today CC Online provides 18 accredited online associate degree, 17 online certificate programs, and over 160 courses distributed over 350 sections each year, with complete online support services including library resources, tutoring, orientation, assessment, counseling, and textbook purchasing.

As technology continues to advance, it is clear that online learning will continue to be an important part of the fabric of college life. Cerro Coso will remain on the cutting edge, integrating new technology to transform the learning experience, and develop the infrastructure needed to properly support end-users. Online education is essential in today's economies, but physical campuses provide tremendous value in exposing students to new people, new ideas, new experiences, and creating a network of valuable connections.

Renovation of the Main Building will transform the 1970s-era structure into a state-of-the-art learning environment designed to engage students and support innovative instruction. One of the Ridgecrest campus' original buildings, the Main Building was designed to house all of the college's operations. Over the years the building has been retrofitted, modified, and adapted to support a growing range of programs and services providing opportunity and means for people to broaden their horizons and improve their lives.

Thoughtful planning and design will renovate the 45-year-old structure into a model of efficiency and learning. Upon completion, a curved lobby will create an inviting place for students to access all the services they need in one central location. High tech classrooms and

simulation laboratories will allow health science students to experience unfolding cases that mirror clinical situations and develop applied skills and build confidence. The renovation also includes improvements to administrative areas, conference rooms with video conferencing capabilities, and a multi-functional community room.

Maintaining a state-of-the-art institution where excellence thrives is impossible without the steadfast encouragement and support of many. The \$17 million project was funded by the passage of Measure G in 2002 and Measure J in 2016.

“The overwhelming support from the communities we serve in passing these construction bonds allows us to move forward in making changes to fit our students' needs and enhance their college experiences,” said Cerro Coso President Jill Board.

Dual and concurrent enrollment of service area high school students is an ongoing priority for the college. This fall, Cerro Coso is offering 30 dual enrollment (high school/college) courses at 11 different high schools, providing high school students an opportunity to earn college credit with no tuition and build credits on a path to a degree or certificate. In some programs, students will have an opportunity to complete their college certificate at the same time they graduate high school.

A sharpened focus on retention, persistence, and graduation will continue to have the college looking for more effective ways to support student achievement. Tremendous effort has been put into a comprehensive institutional strategy for student success that is driven by assessment, planning, shared vision, and the effective alignment of resources to meet goals. Consistent academic and institutional assessment helps the college maintain a high-quality learning environment by making improvements

to programs, structure, course content, and pedagogy.

Part of a growing national trend to reduce the cost of a college education, the college launched the Cerro Coso Promise this fall thanks to the assistance of a California Community College Promise Innovations Grant. The Cerro Coso Promise will give students with the motivation and drive for academic success a tremendous financial boost toward a Cerro Coso education that is second to none and a pathway to success at four-year universities and in the workplace.

As Cerro Coso celebrates 45 years of service to the community, it looks forward to partnering with area organizations and businesses to provide new and relevant opportunities to help ensure students succeed and the community remains a vibrant place to work and live for many years to come. ❖



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DAILY INDEPENDENT FILE PHOTO  
The recently renovated parking lot and drop-off area is shown at Cerro Coso College. The main building is undergoing a renovation as well.

# The Cerro Coso Promise set to help remove barriers to higher education

College is about getting started on the right foot, but it's expensive. Students that graduate from today's universities are burdened with excessively high debt. In 2016, the national student loan debt was \$640 billion more than national credit card debt.

The announcement in April by Cerro Coso Community College to launch the Cerro Coso Promise this fall — making college more affordable to hard-working, dedicated, local students — was beyond exciting.

"For too long, the opportunities afforded by a college degree or certificate have seemed out of reach for many in our community," said Cerro Coso President Jill Board. "We are proud to work with the Cerro Coso Community College Foundation in leading the way to break down barriers for student success and college access. By ensuring that more local students are prepared for, enroll in, and graduate from college, we will diversify the workforce and ensure our local economy has the skilled workers needed for 21st century jobs."

Designed to provide support for students through the creation of a college-going culture while increasing student persistence and degree completion for continuing students, the Cerro Coso Promise will provide up to \$1,000 per semester to qualifying students to offset the cost of tuition, fees, and books, filling in any financial gaps left after applying for state and federal financial aid and scholarships.

The Cerro Coso Promise is built upon three core elements: College Readiness programs, Cerro Coso Promise awards, and College Pathways partnerships. The CCCC Foundation, when leveraged with other sources of financial aid, will ensure up to two years of financial assis-

tance for qualifying students through the Cerro Coso Promise. Starting this fall, eligible students will also receive priority registration, academic advising, faculty mentors, career planning, and transfer assistance.

"Opening the door to education for those who might otherwise not receive it means providing opportunities that benefit not only the individual as they excel in their academic journey, but also the community in preparing a talented, skilled, and dedicated workforce," said Board. "We want to encourage students to go to college locally, take a full load, get a degree or certificate, or transfer to a university."

California Community College students pay \$46 a unit in fees, which comes to \$1,104 a year for students taking four three-unit classes over two semesters. The Promise won't pay for all fees of every student, but would cover a substantial portion of whatever is left after a student has received state or federal financial aid or scholarships.

Committed to the idea that no one should have to leave home to get a world-class education, the Cerro Coso Promise encourages individuals to stay here, make steady progress, fulfill the requirements, and then enter the workforce, or transfer to a university.

An education has never been more expensive or competitive. The Cerro Coso Promise is a structural solution to college access and debt.

The Cerro Coso Community College Foundation will launch a comprehensive fund-raising campaign in support of the Cerro Coso Promise to promote a high quality of life by providing a pathway and resource for students aspiring to earn a college degree or certificate locally. ❖



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MICHAEL SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT

Burroughs High School students wait outside for their first class of the year to begin on Tuesday, Aug. 15.



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# Building better schools, inside and out

By Michael Smit  
The Daily Independent

The 2017-18 academic school year has only just begun, but it already looks to be a significant year for the Sierra Sands Unified School District. From the outside, the most obvious change going on is the large scale construction and renovations at Burroughs High School and the brand new campus for Murray Middle School. However, there's also a lot happening on the inside.

One in five of all SSUSD teachers are new to the district this year, according to SSUSD assistant superintendent of human resources David Ostash. Not all of them are brand new teachers — Ostash said that many of them have years of experience — but they're new to working in SSUSD schools. Ostash said that while this does present some challenges, it's overall a very positive sign.

Also, the district continues to adjust its curriculum to the updated education model of common core. In some cases, this means training sessions for teachers. In other cases, it can mean an entirely new set of books and materials for a subject.

### Construction

Construction crews and trucks swarmed the campuses of Burroughs High School and Murray Middle school just a week before the academic year was scheduled to start on Aug. 15. Yet, the schools were both

ready to open on time.

These two schools were able to receive updates thanks to a U.S. Department of Defense grant which paid for 80 percent of the construction for those two specific schools. The construction happened in the first place because representatives from DoD visited every school campus on the grounds of a U.S. military base. For SSUSD, that included

Burroughs, Murray, and Richmond Elementary.

The DoD found that Richmond didn't require updates to meet their standards, but Burroughs did. They also decided to build an entirely new campus for Murray, which used to sit on the base. Moving the school off the base makes it far more accessible, and avoids the disruptions the school used to experience from activities happening on the base. Murray now sits just across the street from Burroughs, and both schools lie on the border of the base's property.

The DoD grant had certain updates it required for all schools on military bases, such as blast proof windows and modern education technology such as smart projectors in every classroom, which allow teachers to not only project images but to

also write on the images surface in real time.

The grant funding also provided SSUSD with the opportunity to make some quality of life adjustments to the Burroughs campus. The student lockers — which have always sat outside in a shade structure — have moved to a far more comfortable location in the school's halls. The halls themselves were completely renovated too, providing brand



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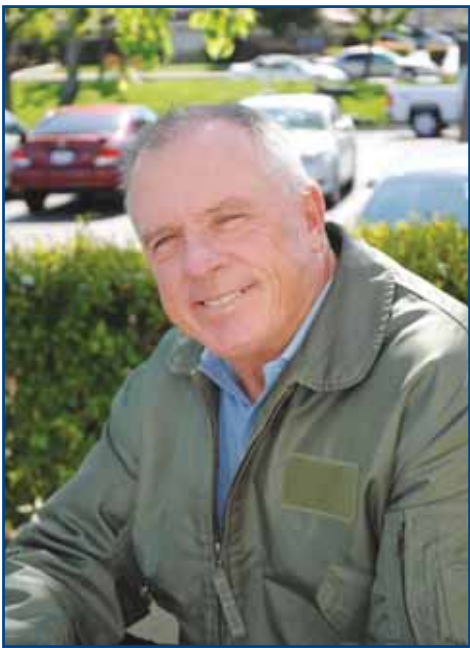
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new classrooms that are the same size, yet somehow feel larger. The new rooms are also powered by a brand new heating and cooling system which works better and is quieter than the older system.

Though construction reached a point where students could start classes by the beginning of the school year, the renovating is by no means complete. Construction crews donning hard hats and neon safety vests continue the work on campus as students go about their studies, a fact of life that the Burroughs orchestra poked fun at when they came out for their back to school concert wearing mock up hard hats and safety vests.

A number of projects are still under construction at Burroughs, including the renovated lunch room, mechanical shop, and some of the classroom halls. Construction crews have been rotating renovation on the class halls for over a year so that there's always enough classes available for school to carry on.

At Murray, the projects are more clearly visible. Work on the school's gym, by far the largest building on campus, was put on hold so crews could get the classrooms ready for the start of the year. With classes ready, the focus once again shifts to getting the gym up and running. Additionally, the school appears fairly bare bones now, but crews are working on finishing the main square and other adornments. And of course, once the crews are done the staff and students themselves will be able to play their part in making the buildings both look and feel like a hub of the community.

**New teachers**

SSUSD has always had a difficult time filling teaching positions because Ridgecrest and Inyokern are such remote locations. Most small towns can simply recruit teachers from the next town over, but SSUSD doesn't have that luxury. There is no next town over.

Making matters even more difficult is the fact that more teachers than ever are ending their careers and beginning their retirement

years.

"We've been reading for at least a decade that the baby boomers are this giant generation and they're going to be retiring," Ostash said. "Well, we don't have to read about it anymore, it's actually happening. That's what really hit me in the face this year, it's actually happening."

Despite the large number of positions to fill and the difficulty in filling them, the district got it done. Ostash said that most years begin with the team still scrambling to hire the last few teachers while temporary instructors lead the class, but this year they had every teacher position filled.

"This is the best year I can remember us having, and I've been here for 34 years," SSUSD superintendent Ernie Bell said.

SSUSD's HR team pulled out all the tools in their arsenal to fill the vacancies. Of course, the internet has proven to be an invaluable recruiting tool, allowing SSUSD to reach far beyond their district to find teachers. However, the best technique is still meeting face to face.

Ostash said that every year he and SSUSD credential analyst/technician Jan Burke head out of town to hit up job fairs in search of new teachers. They head out as far as towns in Utah and Montana. Ostash said that they try to get to job fairs in areas with a similar quality of life as Ridgecrest, looking for people who would find comfort in the small town lifestyle.

In total, SSUSD hired 52 new teachers, or 20 percent of their entire teacher workforce. With so many new faces in the district, and many of them coming from out of town, the focus now shifts to making sure these new recruits have the support they need to feel at home and provide great education to the students.

**Updating curriculum**

At the end of the day, the most important thing about school isn't about a new gym or a sports team or what state the teacher is from. The most important thing is educating students. And SSUSD is trying

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to stay on the leading edge of that front. This year, the district has purchased an entire new curriculum for the English Learning Arts classes for its classes in kindergarten through eighth grade. The goal is to keep up with the Common Core curriculum students will need to make sure they're prepared for the next step, whether that step be into higher education or into a career.

Ostash said that Common Core was adopted years ago, but has rolled out slowly in order to allow schools time to adapt to its new standards and techniques. The new English Language Arts curriculum SSUSD purchased comes with entirely new books and material.

The goal of Common Core is to provide a modern education for a modern world.

"It focuses on critical thinking and understanding the process of understanding a problem. It focuses on why that's the answer, not just what the answer is. That's what Common Core intends to do," Ostash said.

In history, it wants students to not simply scan to memorize names printed in bold so they can be plugged into a test. Instead, Common Core will want students to fill out a short answer, explaining the significance of the piece of history.

Math has perhaps seen the largest change in teaching technique under Common Core. In a world where everyone now has a smartphone with a calculator in their pockets, it's no longer relevant to simply memorize mathematical properties. Common Core attempts to not just teach students that 6 times 7 equals 42, but to teach them why it equals 42 so that they're better equipped to tackle more complex techniques later on in their education.

Ostash said, "It focuses less on what, and more on the why and how."

Some parents find Common Core frustrating because its methods in some subjects like math are so different from previous decades that the parents can't even help their young kids with homework. Ostash said that even he



MICHAEL SMIT/DAILY INDEPENDENT  
**Sierra Sands Unified School District superintendent Ernie Bell stands at the new Murray Middle School campus as finishing touches were added before school began this year.**

struggles with this sometimes.

He laughed and pointed to his diploma hanging from the wall, saying, "I've got a doctorate and I can't even help her."

However, he stated that it's attempting to better prepare students for a modern, technologically advanced world where problem solving and critical thinking will likely be the most sought after traits. But he also stated that it's too early to tell if Common Core is effective, as most changes like this often take years to produce clear effects.

While the effects of Common Core remain to be seen, Ostash noted that SSUSD works hard to ensure are prepared for the world they find themselves in right now. He explained that proximity to NAWS China Lake has a lot of educational benefits. SSUSD has a strong partnership with the base, he said.

This partnership results in Career Technical Education four course program where students can study Introduction to Engineering

and Design, Principles of Engineering, Digital Electronics, and Civil Engineering and Architecture.

"Most high schools do not have these programs," Ostash said. "When I was a student, I certainly didn't have them."

The partnership between SSUSD and NAWS China Lake allows students to get hands on experience working on projects with active engineers and scientists from the base. The program is mutually beneficial, as the students get access to this rare opportunity and NAWS China Lake is able to develop student interest in someday working on the base, which they want because local students are already adapted to the unique lifestyle of the area.

With new schools, new faces, and new books, there's a lot happening at Sierra Sands Unified School District during this academic year. They're building better schools, both inside and out. ♦



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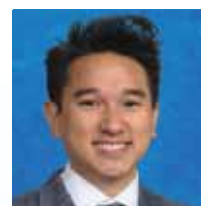
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