



From the City Manager's Desk

a weekly report from Scott Ochoa, City of Monrovia



April 4, 2008

Injured Monrovia Officer is Doing Well

Sergeant Daniel Verna is recuperating after engaging in a gunfight with an armed suspect last Saturday night/Sunday morning. Sergeant Verna, a native Monrovia and outstanding officer over the last decade, arrived near the Mayflower Avenue/Duarte Road intersection in response to a call from a beat officer who observed some suspicious activity on a nearby street. The reporting officer observed the suspect and attempted to conduct a field interview but the suspect fled. The officer updated police dispatch on the situation and a containment area was quickly established with other law enforcement units.

Sergeant Verna and a CHP officer, who was augmenting the patrol force as part of the CalGRIP grant the City recently received, observed the suspect in a driveway on Duarte Road, just west of Mayflower. The large suspect (reportedly 6'2", 250 lbs.) was able to conceal a small caliber hand gun from officers until the very last moment, when he fired at Sergeant Verna. The bullet struck the sergeant in the chin, ricocheted out from under the right side of his jaw, and ultimately ended up in his shoulder. As I spoke to Sergeant Verna on Sunday afternoon, he explained that his training and adrenaline took over at that point, as he clearly and calmly directed incoming police units while returning fire on the suspect.

The suspect was hit several times, but will survive and likely be booked on two counts of attempted murder. Allegedly, this suspect is connected by local law enforcement to a number of heinous crimes and is a wanted man. Sergeant Verna and all of the personnel on duty that night – from the initial officer who observed the suspicious activity, to the other beat officers who promptly responded, to the dispatchers helping guide the containment operation – all performed superbly. They truly defined police effectiveness and professionalism.

Sergeant Verna was released from the hospital on Sunday afternoon and went home. Within a day he was out and about, buoying the spirits of fellow officers, meeting with folks in the Police Station and later at City Hall – still extremely sore, mind you. But for as long as I have known him, Dan Verna has never been one to complain; he's always been much more focused on making sure the folks around him feel safe and comfortable. After a few weeks rest and recovery, he'll no doubt be back in the line doing just that.

Thank you, Dan. Heal up and come back.

City Council Meeting Recap

Tuesday's Council meeting was quite short but very noteworthy. Under presentations, we had the public introduction of our three newest Police Officers, Seth Hermes, Daniel Velasquez, and Marco Lopez; our new Police Dispatcher Laura Overton; our new Animal Control Officer Maggie Beach; and our new Jailer Christine Garland. We also presented Neighborhood Pride Award winners Junie Thompson and Richard & Martha Quinones.

Under Reports of Council Members, Councilman Adams requested several items be placed on the agenda for discussion. Based on public input from members of the Monrovia Police Officers' Association (MPOA) at the last City Council meeting regarding the amount of hours and overtime they are working, the lack of "tools and resources" that they have to fight crime, and the perceived inability of the City to recruit police officers, Mr. Adams put forth several motions to address each of these issues.

Specifically, Mr. Adams made motions that staff explore reversion to a 5/40 (five, 8 hour days) work week in lieu on the current 3/12; the elimination of all non-essential overtime for police officers (e.g., commercial film details, Family Festival, parades and special events); and the recruitment of upper-rank positions such as sergeant and lieutenant from outside agencies (as opposed to hiring from within, which only creates a vacancy at the police officer rank). The Council also directed that I write a letter to MPOA President Phil Nelson to inquire as to which specific tools are needed by officers to help fight crime.

Each of these motions was seconded and passed 5-0.

Although a handful of folks (including the MPOA) have cried foul with respect to the Council's actions, as I explained to a reporter this week, this is the danger in negotiating complex issues such as labor relations in the public arena – very often one side will attempt to distill intricate details into short sound-bites because they are appealing to the emotions of the audience, as opposed to the business rationale of the decision-making body.

Negotiating in public makes the public record all the more important; and what MPOA members entered into the public record at the March 18 City Council was entirely focused on long hours and overtime. In talking with individual MPOA members in the interim, I advised that in trying to apply political pressure in the public arena in the future, they are better off clearly stating what they want – if you want a 23.2% raise, then ask for it and be prepared to argue your point decisively; but don't talk about hours or overtime and then be shocked or upset when the answer you receive from the Council is focused on that which you have articulated.

In other words, "That's not what we meant" isn't much of a response.

Additionally, it has been suggested that the Council's actions were somehow "punitive" toward MPOA. I disagree. If the Council wanted to go tit-for-tat with the MPOA's tactics, the City could have generated three flimsy lawsuits to mirror those brought by the MPOA's attorney. Instead, the City remains steadfast in its willingness to discuss and negotiate in good faith a reasonable and fiscally responsible employment contract with the MPOA for the coming fiscal year. The MPOA's posturing and rhetoric demonstrated to this point will have no effect on the City's ability to pay more – or less – for police services in the future.

As Mayor Hammond has stated repeatedly, Monrovia does not save money when it comes to public safety. We will offer and put forth all that we can while still maintaining the full complement of municipal services – which, incidentally, also contribute to the public's safety – and maintaining prudent and business-wise financial planning policies.

Lastly, we had one Administrative Report on the agenda, but it was a big one. AR-1 was the award of contract for Library Bid Packet No.3. You have probably noticed that the new Library's pad has been graded and plumbing is now being installed. Structural concrete and steel will be coming in the next few weeks, and soon after the construction will be going gangbusters.

Bid Packet No.3 covers the drywall, lath and plaster; the HVAC and the electrical systems. The bid pack also initially covered the fire protection system; however, too many inconsistencies and omissions in that bid caused our Public Works staff and project managers to throw those bids out and re-bid the program.

The lowest responsible bidders for all three bid elements came in well below our Engineer's estimate. The slowing economy at least has granted us the "silver lining" for construction pricing – there were a number of very aggressive bids. So much so, that one bidder even challenged the licensing of another (lower) bidder. Ultimately, however, the license issue was resolved and the Council unanimously awarded the following bids:

- ML-07 (drywall, lath and plaster) to Versatile Coatings in the amount of \$1,511,148.
- ML-09 (HVAC) to Cool Air HVAC Company in the amount of \$631,000.
- ML-10 (electrical) to Berg Electric in the amount of \$1,119,300.

As always, if you have any questions about any item on the agenda, please feel free to contact me directly.

MAP Event on Saturday

Speaking of Monrovia's collaborative efforts to enhance public safety, this Saturday (April 5) the Neighborhood Strategy Team will be holding the second neighborhood block party in MAP Area 2, on the 500 block of Royal Oaks Drive. This block has some unique features that present both challenges and opportunities for the Neighborhood Strategy Team. It is a small street and we do have already a number of "Points of Contact" that help pave the way for residents' participation in MAP. But it also has a number of "double-fronting" lots on the north side of the street.

These properties, because of the narrowness of the block between East Walnut and Royal Oaks, span the entire block – in other words, a house may have a front door on Walnut and back door on Royal Oaks (and vice-versa). This basically pock-marks a street with blighted rear-fences and/or garages, and contributes to the street's overall decline. We will be speaking in detail with local residents about remedying these and other issues, and it promises to be another great event.

If you have any questions about MAP, please feel free to contact Neighborhood Preservation Division Manager Bill Skiles.

Skate Park Safety Policy

Over the last several months especially, Skate Park patrons' disregard for the City's posted policy of wearing protective gear has grown significantly. While on the one hand we are very happy that so many young people are using the Skate Park, on the other hand, we need to ensure that kids are safe and not setting a bad example for some of the younger skaters. Thus, the Police Department and Library staff (as the Library is now temporarily located in the Youth Center) will begin enforcing the protective gear rule.

Obviously, we do not want to issue non-criminal infractions for violations of the policy; but we do need the skaters to adhere to the rules of the facility. The young people using the Skate Park are usually willing (even if initially reluctant) to don their helmet and/or pads, and we find that as long as enforcement is consistent, compliance is not an issue. If you have any questions on this policy, please feel free to contact the City's Risk Manager Theresa St. Peter.

Gold Line Community Meeting on April 8

Please visit the City's website www.cityofmonrovia.org to send a letter of support for the Gold Line to the MTA. The MTA has thus far been lukewarm to including the Gold Line Foothill Extension into their Long Range Plan, despite the fact that the Gold Line is the most cost-effective, fully-entitled and partially federally funded project on the horizon. Essentially, if the MTA were to put the Gold Line into its plan and commit a local match of \$80 million, the federal government (under a bipartisan effort by Congress members David Dreier, Adam Schiff and Hilda Solis) would leverage that amount by another \$320 million to get the line built through to Citrus College.

On April 8 the MTA is holding a regional meeting in Rosemead (see the City's website for details) followed by a key Board meeting on April 24 at MTA headquarters in the downtown LA. Please voice your support now!

Rio Hondo Fire Academy to Help Protect Monrovia Foothills?

Thanks to the great work of our Fire Chief Chris Donovan and an old friend of Monrovia, former Police Chief Joe Santoro, it appears that Monrovia may be in store for some valuable assistance in safeguarding the Monrovia foothills. Joe Santoro now heads up Rio Hondo's public safety program and has seen the need to provide training to firefighter cadets. Chief Donovan met with Joe to talk about a pilot program that would allow Rio Hondo's cadets to utilize Monrovia's Wilderness Station (off of Cloverleaf Drive), for a wide range of firefighting activities – from clearing brush, to providing foot patrols, to enhancing natural fire breaks (though not controlled burns). This exciting program will be presented to the Council in the coming weeks. If you have specific questions about the program, feel free to contact Chief Donovan.

Articles Attached

- **Officer-involved shooting details emerge.** Sgt. Verna and the Monrovia PD helped capture a very bad individual and make this *region* a safer place.
- **Thomas Elias: Proposition battle about eminent domain.** Once again, ballot-box legislating in California will yield unintended consequences that will hamstring us well into the future – unless we just vote NO.
- **Message must be loud, clear.** MTA is a creature of Los Angeles, but it is *supposed* to serve the whole region...here's hoping.
- **Lawmakers urge Metro to OK extension.** Everyone out here is united, regardless of whatever side of the aisle they sit on.
- **Red wigglers' help Monrovia get rid of trash.** Saving the world, one heap of garbage at a time...

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

CDBG Funded Program Receives Well Deserved Recognition. This year, as part of the "National Community Development Week" celebration, the Los Angeles County Community Development Commission (CDC) highlighted several of the most successful CDBG partner programs in Los Angeles County. The CDC prepared a presentation on these success stories to be presented to the National Community Development Association as part of National Community Development week. The Monrovia Summer Extravaganza was one of the programs the CDC chose to highlight.

For more than a decade, Monrovia's "Summer Extravaganza" Program has been providing a free summer day camp for the youth of our community. The Summer Extravaganza serves 400 children annually from ages six to sixteen whose families could not otherwise afford to participate. The program is partially funded by Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds along with City and some private donations.

The purpose of the CDBG program is to help strengthen neighborhoods, empower families, support local economies and promote individual achievement. Due to its emphasis on flexibility, CDBG remains one of the most effective forms of federal assistance available to local governments. Over the past few years, CDBG has been the target of continuing budget cuts just narrowly escaping elimination. A grassroots lobbying campaign supported by the City of Monrovia was successful in saving CDBG but funding has remained at reduced levels. We appreciate the recognition given to Monrovia's Summer Extravaganza and hope that the Administration and Congress will see the benefit that this and other CDBG funded programs have accomplished throughout the country.

Special Event Permit

- Los Angeles County Public Health Services will be holding a Community Health Fair in celebration of Public Health Week at the Monrovia Health Center, 330 W. Maple Avenue on Tuesday, April 8, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The event will also serve as advertisement of the services that are offered by the Monrovia Health Center. There will be free services offered including adult immunizations, mammograms and pap smears. There will also be information provided on the West Nile Virus, emergency preparedness, no-cost and low-cost health insurance, dental services and nutrition.
- The American Cancer Society will be "Painting Our Town Purple" by decorating the downtown trees with purple balloons, ribbons and streamers on Saturday, April 5, between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. Local merchants will be encouraged to decorate their windows with a purple display. The purple decorations are to celebrate cancer survivorship and to bring attention to the yearly "Relay for Life" event that will be held on April 26-27, 2008 in Recreation Park. The decorations will be removed early Sunday morning, April 6.

April 2 Development Review Committee Meeting Recap

- The Committee approved the new signage for Lifestyles AT &T retailer located at 678 W. Huntington Drive.
- A sign was approved for the new Bates Company Building at 139 E. Olive Avenue.
- The Monrovia Animal Medical Center Building monument sign at 1128 S. Myrtle Avenue was approved to replace a nonconforming pole sign.
- The new sign for "Mi Tio Fast Food" restaurant building at 229 E. Foothill Blvd. was approved.
- The Committee recommended to the Planning Commission the use of an existing building located at 805 S. Shamrock Avenue for the storage of antique vehicles and other collectibles.
- The Committee approved the new front entry garage to an existing single-family residence at 800 Oakglade Drive.
- A new two-story single-family house located at 1410 Encino Avenue was approved.
- The Committee reviewed and approved a new second story on the existing single-family residence lot at 828 S. California Avenue.
- A minor exception to encroach into the west side yard setback with an addition to a single-family residence at 125 Spanner Avenue was approved.
- The Committee continued the minor exception to encroach into the north side yard setback with an addition to a single-family residence at 150 Poppy Avenue pending the applicant's submittal of adequate plans.
- The Committee approved the grading plan for residential development on the 700 block of Myrtle Avenue subject to Public Works Department and Planning Division's approval.

Colorado Commons Certificate of Occupancy. A Certificate of Occupancy has been issued for the 68-unit/5,000 square foot Old Town residential/commercial development located on Colorado Boulevard, Primrose and Lemon Avenues. The Building and Planning Divisions did an excellent job from conception to completion on this project.



COMMUNITY SERVICES HAPPENINGS

Gigi and Mike Lead Hootenanny Sing-Along. Gigi Johnson and Mike Salas led a good old-fashioned library-sponsored sing-along and hootenanny on Thursday, March 27 at Bradoaks Elementary. Gigi and Mike are familiar to Monrovians (at least Monrovians with cable) from their many performances on local access KGEM television. A mix of library patrons and young Bradoaks Village participants helped the singing duo belt out such old favorites as “She’ll Be Comin’ ‘Round the Mountain” and new kid-friendly songs like “Monster Truck.” The library partnered with Bradoaks Elementary and specially invited all students to attend. On April 24, the library will return to Bradoaks for *John Abrams Animal Magic*.

Monrovia Reading 500. Drivers, start your engines and open those books! In honor of National Library Week, young readers are invited to participate in the first ever Monrovia Reading 500! Infants through high-schoolers can finish five laps (that is, read five books or 150 pages or read for 150 minutes) and earn a prize. The reading program runs April 1 to 19.

National Library Week. Join the Circle of Knowledge at Your Library by celebrating *National Library Week* with Monrovia Public Library and join our festivities on April 13 – 19. All week long we’ll have giveaways (spin our prize wheel for fun stuff), demonstrations, and fun activities for all ages - don’t miss out. Special family events:

- Tuesday, April 15, 3 to 5 p.m., Mary Archibald demonstrates the art of Plein Air painting using watercolors. Try your hand with paints and create a picture to take home. Mary has taught for many years and is currently working with students at the Monrovia Adult School. She will also be displaying some of her Monrovia scenes.

- Wednesday, April 16, 3 to 5 p.m., Pam Holt from Buddha Dog opens up a whole new avenue in caring for our four-legged family members by demonstrating pet massage. Her canine friend Shug, a Dachshund/Corgi mix, is the subject for her pet massage demonstration. Questions and petting encouraged!
- Thursday, April 17, 3 to 5 p.m., Jan Emanuel, retired Pasadena teacher and co-founder of *Quilting Sistas*, demonstrates quilting. Following a tradition that is hundreds of years old, Jan and friends give quilts a new design twist and modern approach to the craft. Create your own one-of-a-kind “quilted” paper bookmark to take home.

Literacy Services Collaborates with Local Rehabilitation Facility. Phoenix House is a rehabilitation facility located in Monrovia, serving about 35 women at a time. Among the residents’ numerous needs are the need to improve their literacy skills. Many of the residents did not graduate from high school and did poorly while in school. Their low literacy means that they have limited capacity to find a well-paid job or explore topics of personal fulfillment, both of which are necessary for them to stay away from drugs and crime.

The one-to-one tutoring format of Literacy Services is perfect for Phoenix House residents, allowing them to work at their own pace, read materials of interest to them and receive regular affirmation of their successes. Most of the Phoenix House residents do get jobs or enroll in formal schooling before they exit the program, due in part to the efforts of their volunteer tutors and their improved literacy skills. While all of the students in Literacy Services improve their reading and writing skills, the impact of improved literacy for Phoenix House residents is truly life-transforming. Literacy Services congratulates Phoenix House residents for their successes and especially thanks the patient and compassionate volunteer tutors that work with them.

Monrovia Reads and Plays Flies Through the Streets of Monrovia. One of this week’s activities at Monrovia Reads and Plays (MRP) was making and flying kites, organized by Literacy Services AmeriCorps member Chris Hynes. This activity was good for encouraging creativity in the kids, teaching them the basic principles of aerodynamics and getting them physically active. MRP strives to increase the kids’ intellectual and physical activity, both of which were accomplished by making kites. Plus it was lots of fun, which is definitely high on MRP’s priority list!

Monrovia Reads and Plays. The Monrovia Reads and Plays program had a fun-filled month of March. The Monrovia Fire Department visited the program on March 12. A fire truck was on display for the kids to enjoy and learn more about the fire department. On March 15, ten Monrovia Reads and Plays participants visited the MAP Area 2 kickoff event on Almond Avenue and enjoyed games and activities offered during the event. The Spring Egg Hunt took place on March 22 and the Monrovia Reads and Plays program arranged for participants to visit the event. Participants received a free basket with tickets for carnival games and activities offered at the event. Spring Break field trips have been planned for the week of April 7 -11 for participants who have earned enough incentive points. On April 7, participants will be visiting Canyon Park for a hike to the waterfall and lunch. On April 11, participants will be visiting the Monrovia Fire Department for a tour of Fire Station 1 and conclude with a matinee at the Krikorian Theatre.

Canyon Park Teams up with Monrovia Animal Control. At the March volunteer meeting, the volunteers and staff at Canyon Park coupled with the Monrovia’s Animal Control staff to better understand the animal regulations and how to handle potential problems of dealing with off leash dogs. The meeting also included discussion about the local wildlife and how to educate people about living in harmony with the wild animals in the foothills.

Seniors Show Off Their Spelling Skills. Starting Monday, April 21, Monrovia senior citizens will start studying for "The Monrovia Senior Spelling Bee." Many exciting activities are scheduled (see below) leading up to the final competition, which will include the top senior spellers from Duarte and Arcadia. Join the fun and test your spelling skills! To help you prepare, 100 possible spelling words will be distributed to all competitors. For more information and to register, call (626) 256-8246 and don't miss the fun!

SPELLING BEE ACTIVITIES

Cinco De Mayo Luncheon
Monday, May 5, 1 to 2 p.m.
\$5 per person

*Final day to register for spelling bee

Summer School Luncheon
Thursday, June 12, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Free to all registered spelling bee competitors

Magic Madness
Wednesday, July 16, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.
\$5 per person
Includes Lunch and Magic Show
Competitors from Duarte and Arcadia Senior Center will be introduced

Spelling Bee and Sock Hop
Thursday, August 7, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.
\$5 per person
Includes Lunch, Spelling Bee and Sock Hop

FROM THE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Personnel responded to 63 emergency calls from 0800 hours 3/27/08, to 0800 hours on 4/1/08. Significant incidents include:

Traffic Collision with Extrication: On Friday, March 28 at 2140 hours, firefighters responded to a traffic collision at Mountain and Huntington. Upon arrival, firefighters noticed that there were two patients in a vehicle that had struck a stationary semi-truck. The passenger was removed, treated and transported to Huntington Memorial hospital in stable condition. Due to the condition of the vehicle, firefighters extricated the driver using the "Jaws of Life" then evaluated, treated and transported the patient to Huntington Memorial Hospital in stable condition.

Police Officer Shot: On Sunday, March 30 at 0021 hours, firefighters were dispatched to the intersection of Duarte and Mayflower to an officer involved shooting. Firefighters arrived on scene and found that one Monrovia police officer and one suspect had been shot. Firefighters treated the officer for wounds to the face and shoulder then transported him to Huntington Memorial Hospital in stable condition. The suspect was treated for wounds and was transported to Huntington Memorial Hospital in serious condition.

Medication Reaction: On Saturday, March 29 at 1514 hours, firefighters were dispatched to a reported seizure in the 200 block of West Cypress. The patient was found to have had put a medication in his eye that was prescribed for his son. The patient wanted to check the medication before using on his 1-year-old son. The patient suffered a blown pupil that could possibly be permanent due to the accidental overdose of the medication.

OPERATIONS

This week firefighters completed quarterly service on the Department's aerial ladder. The process takes several hours cleaning the entire 100 feet of the ladder itself, along with the cables and other working parts. This maintenance is required to assure the smooth operation of the ladder and to avoid any damage caused by a lack of lubrication.

FIRE PREVENTION AND NEW CONSTRUCTION

Have you ever thought about how many chemicals you have in your home? Do you have oven cleaner, drain cleaner, furniture polish, toilet cleaners, bleach, ant sprays, bug sprays, moth repellants, air conditioning refrigerants, antifreeze, insecticides, fluorescent light bulbs in the house? Although the risk of a chemical accident is slight, knowing how to handle these products and how to react during an emergency can reduce the risk of injury. Here are the CDC's recommendations:

Take Protective Measures Before a Household Chemical Emergency

The following are guidelines for buying and storing hazardous household chemicals safely:

- Buy only as much of a chemical as you think you will use. Leftover material can be shared with neighbors or donated to a business, charity, or government agency. For example, excess pesticide could be offered to a greenhouse or garden center, and theater groups often need surplus paint. Some communities have organized waste exchanges where household hazardous chemicals and waste can be swapped or given away.
- Keep products containing hazardous materials in their original containers and never remove the labels unless the container is corroding. Corroding containers should be repackaged and clearly labeled.
- Never store hazardous products in food containers.
- Never mix household hazardous chemicals or waste with other products. Incompatibles, such as chlorine bleach and ammonia, may react, ignite, or explode.

Take the Following Precautions to Prevent and Respond to Accidents:

- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for the proper use of the household chemical.
- Never smoke while using household chemicals.
- Never use hair spray, cleaning solutions, paint products, or pesticides near an open flame (e.g., pilot light, lighted candle, fireplace, wood burning stove, etc.). Although you may not be able to see or smell them, vapor particles in the air could catch fire or explode.
- Clean up any chemical spill immediately. Use rags to clean up the spill. Wear gloves and eye protection. Allow the fumes in the rags to evaporate outdoors, then dispose of the rags by wrapping them in a newspaper and placing them in a sealed plastic bag in your trash can.
- Dispose of hazardous materials correctly. Take household hazardous waste to a local collection program. Check with your county or state environmental or solid waste agency to learn if there is a household hazardous waste collection program in your area.

Learn to Recognize the Symptoms of Toxic Poisoning, which are as follows:

- Difficulty breathing.
- Irritation of the eyes, skin, throat, or respiratory tract.
- Changes in skin color.
- Headache or blurred vision.
- Dizziness.
- Clumsiness or lack of coordination.
- Cramps or diarrhea.

Be Prepared to Seek Medical Assistance:

- Post the number of the emergency medical services and the poison control center by all telephones. In an emergency situation, you may not have time to look up critical phone numbers. The national poison control number is (800) 222-1222.

During a Household Chemical Emergency

If there is a danger of fire or explosion:

- Get out of the residence immediately. Do not waste time collecting items or calling the fire department when you are in danger. Call the fire department from outside (a cellular phone or a neighbor's phone) once you are safely away from danger.
- Stay upwind and away from the residence to avoid breathing toxic fumes.

If someone has been exposed to a household chemical:

- Find any containers of the substance that are readily available in order to provide requested information. Call emergency medical services.
- Follow the emergency operator or dispatcher's first aid instructions carefully. The first aid advice found on containers may be out of date or inappropriate. Do not give anything by mouth unless advised to do so by a medical professional.
- Discard clothing that may have been contaminated. Some chemicals may not wash out completely.

TRAINING AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

The Monrovia Fire Department completed the testing process for Fire Engineer this week. Five candidates participated in the promotional testing, conducted March 24 and 27. Participants were tested in their knowledge of general fire service practices and fire engineering expertise. A written exam was administered, March 24, to test the candidates' ability in general Fire Science, firefighting techniques, and fire pumping hydraulic calculations and complexities. All five candidates successfully completed this phase of testing and were invited to participate in the practical testing evolutions, March 27.

The practical (hands-on) evolutions testing consisted of four major components; Pre-Trip Driving Inspection, Emergency/Non-Emergency Vehicle Operation, Fire Engine and Water Tender Hydraulic Pumping Operations, and Ladder Truck Aerial & Rescue Operations. Each candidate was tested on each skills component. The events were designed to be challenging and realistic. The results have not been posted at this time, but a promotion for one individual should be made within the next few weeks!

The Fire Department would like to thank the following cities for providing us with technical experts that assisted with evaluating the candidates in each event:

- Pasadena Fire Department
- Arcadia Fire Department
- La Verne Fire Department
- Ontario Fire Department
- Alhambra Fire Department
- Beverly Hills Fire Department

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES

It is brush season again here in Monrovia and our annual Brush Mitigation Program is starting to ramp up. We have completed an extensive overhaul of the brush inspection process, including merging the new City Administrative Fine Ordinance into the program. We are also proud to announce a new joint

venture with the Rio Hondo College Wildland Hand Crew, which is described in great detail below. You can also read the attached letter that is being mailed to residents that live within the very high fire hazard zone slated to go out next week in the residential brush packet.

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

Monrovia is proud to announce two new innovative programs that will begin next week – the Paramedic Attrition Plan and Rio Hondo College Wildland Hand Crew project.

Monrovia has long looked for innovative and progressive methods to fill vacancies in the highly competitive Firefighter Paramedic positions within the Department and we are proud to announce the first of its kind program that will begin a new method of filling the pipeline with qualified candidates to replace Firefighter Paramedic vacancies within the department. The Paramedic Attrition Plan looks to identified qualified candidates, through a formal testing and selection process, to attend Paramedic School, which lasts six-months. Those individuals selected will be members of the Fire Department as Firefighter Trainees, being paid an hourly wage without benefits. These individuals will also have the cost of tuition paid by the City and once certified as a Paramedic will then be eligible for hire as a Monrovia Firefighter Paramedic following a selection process.

What is unique about this program is most departments either hire entry level Firefighter Paramedics (individuals who have put themselves through school) or send incumbent Firefighters to Paramedic School which has substantial costs due to the need to backfill the Firefighter's position for six months while in training. Our new program will identify qualified candidates, send them to Paramedic School without the need for the costly backfill and then hire them as full-time Firefighter Paramedics with benefits. This new program should give us a leg up on hiring qualified Firefighter Paramedics and should be a great marketing tool for our existing Cadet program, as those individuals should have an advantage in selection to the Paramedic Attrition Plan given their knowledge of the Department and the City.

The second innovative program that the Monrovia Fire Department is undertaking is a new relationship with Rio Hondo College Fire Technology Department's Wildland Hand Crew. The Fire Department has partnered with Rio Hondo in relocating the college Wildland hand crew into our City. This type II Wildland hand crew is a special team of firefighters used during brush fire operations to create defensive breaks in fuel, thereby slowing and often times stopping the spread of fire. This 20-person crew has logged impressive deployments through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Forest Service (Angeles Forest Division) as is evident in the information found at the website www.firecrew77.com.

Our new agreement will see this 20-person team in our hillsides starting this Thursday as they familiarize themselves with our terrain. They will begin hikes along the trails and motorways while performing routine exercises such as compass drills and shelter deployments. No tools or equipment will be used at this time, but the next phase may see the crew performing fuel reduction and fire break work as we begin the annual brush mitigation program. This cooperative agreement is a benefit to both parties in that the Wildland crew gets to practice their trade on City owned land and we get a type II hand crew in our City performing necessary and effective fuel mitigation work. Eventually the hope is to have the crew stationed at the Wilderness Fire Station located on Cloverleaf, including positioning a water tender and type III engine at that location, but for now we will just see the crew hiking and performing light exercises in the front country.

ON THE POLICE BLOTTER

During the last seven day period, the Police Department handled 546 calls for service resulting in 138 investigations. Following are this week's highlighted issues and events:

Outside Assist / Homicide Arrest. On March 28 at 8:46 a.m., officers responded to assist Los Gatos officers in the 1600 Block of South Myrtle regarding a high risk traffic stop. Los Gatos officers were following two homicide suspects in a vehicle. Our officers assisted on the stop and two suspects were taken into custody. They were taken to Monrovia jail for interviews while awaiting transportation back to the Los Gatos Police Department.

Warrant Arrest / Drug Arrest. On March 29 at 8:50 p.m., officers stopped a vehicle at Myrtle and Montana. In the vehicle were four male occupants. While running computer checks on the subjects, one of the male subjects ran from the officers. The subject made it down to the 210 Freeway and ran up the ramp westbound. Monrovia and California Highway Patrol officers pursued the subject. He was arrested and taken into custody. The subject had a felony warrant. The three remaining subjects were arrested for possession of narcotics, possession of drug paraphernalia and being under the influence of a controlled substance.

Attempt Murder On A Police Officer. On March 29 at 0013 a.m. an officer attempted to stop a suspicious male subject in the area of Alamitas and Fano. The subject fled from the officer. Monrovia and California Highway Patrol Officers responded to the area to set up a perimeter. The subject continued to flee. He made it to the 500 Block of West Duarte Road. A Monrovia and a California Highway Patrol officer confronted the suspect. The suspect fired at the officers with a handgun, striking the Monrovia Officer in the face and shoulder. Both officers returned fire striking the suspect. The officer was taken to the hospital. His injuries were not life threatening and he will fully recover. The suspect was arrested and taken to the hospital. He will recover from his injuries. The suspect was wanted for numerous burglaries in the area

Hit & Run Accident / Wanted Felony Vehicle. On April 2 at 9:45 p.m., officers were dispatched to the area of Huntington and California regarding a hit and run accident. The victim said he was following the suspect's vehicle north on California, and gave the license number to dispatch. The computer indicated the vehicle was connected to a named murder suspect who was wanted by the Los Angeles Police Department. The vehicle stopped in the 500 Block of East Lemon. Two male suspects fled prior to the officer's arrival. Two female juveniles remained in the vehicle. A containment was set up with the assistance of other outside agencies. A canine search was conducted and a male subject was found to be hiding nearby. The suspect was identified as the one driving and he is the son of the registered owner of the vehicle. The suspect was arrested for hit-and-run. The second male was not located. The vehicle was impounded as evidence pending further investigation.



ENGINEERING:

700 S. Myrtle - Urban Housing Group. Grading/drainage plans are in review by our Engineering Division. The demolition permit is being processed by the Building Department and demolition should begin in a couple of weeks. Construction traffic will utilize Myrtle Avenue from the 210 Freeway to Walnut. The project has been fenced and staff is working with Foothill Transit to relocate the eastbound bus stop from the southeast to the southwest corner of Myrtle/Olive.

Public Works Inspections:

- Colorado Commons Street Improvements.
- Bus Shelter Construction
- 911 Royal Oaks
- California/Monrovia/Duarte Project
- 202 E. Foothill
- 1419 S. Myrtle
- 714 Norumbega
- 705 Norumbega
- 335 Genoa
- 705 Norumbega
- 214 N. Madison
- 1612 Alasitas
- 1128 S. Myrtle

OPERATIONS – Environmental – Facilities – Parks:

Student Outreach. Our Public Works Staff provided an interactive presentation to approximately 100 third grade students from Bradoaks Elementary School on Tuesday, April 1 at City Hall. The students observed the Streets Division staff demonstrate the use of several pieces of heavy equipment such as backhoes, pavement breakers and loaders.

Our Environmental Services Staff interacted with the Monrovia High School Auto Maintenance class on April 2, for an overview of our used oil recycling process and proper hazardous waste disposal methods. Each student in attendance received one of the City's Used Oil Recycling kits.

Upcoming Free Household Hazardous Waste/E-waste Collection Events. On Saturday, April 26, Los Angeles County will host a free household hazardous/e-waste (HHW/E) collection event at the Northrop-Grumman Corporation, West 3rd Street and Zachary Padilla Avenue, Azusa. For additional information call our Environmental Services section at 626-932-5553 or log onto www.888cleanLA.com.

Graffiti along Railroad Tracks. Daniel Iwata, Operations Division Manager, met with Jerry Simms, Metro Gold Line Administrative Manager, regarding removal of the graffiti along the railroad tracks between Myrtle and Mountain Avenues. Mr. Simms has agreed that Metro will keep the area graffiti-free.

On-going Projects

- Historical Museum Roof Replacement Project.
- Fire Station 102 Butler Building.
- Barney Glen Ballpark and Parking Lot Light Replacement
- Weed Abatement

Bees. Park Staff responded to three separate bee swarm/hive reports this week at the 100 block of West Lemon. The bees swarmed around the same area at approximately the same time of day on all three occasions, and then left within a few hours. The bees returned Wednesday, and were removed by Walsh's Pest Control on Thursday morning.

Hillcrest Ave—Street of the Month. Weeds and water sprouts will be removed from the tree wells.

Los Angeles County Green Standards. Operations Staff attended a workshop sponsored by Los Angeles County which focused on three Green Standards Initiatives which are being considered for implementation: Green Building, Low Impact Development and Drought Tolerant Landscape. County

Staff discussed requirements of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Certification of new buildings or renovations of 25,000 square feet or more. The workshop was positive reflection of our City Staff who are working towards the same Initiatives through the City's adopted Environmental Accords.

STREETS:

Street and Traffic Signs:

- Graffiti was removed from 11 traffic signs.
- Replaced sweeping sign at 1800 block of S. Mountain Avenue, southwest corner of Mountain and Duarte, and at the northeast corner and southeast corner of Peck Rd. and Atara St.

Miscellaneous:

- Patched potholes: 718 S. Primrose, 130 E. Evergreen, Colorado / Monterey, and 600 W. Walnut
- Painted red curb to facilitate the relocation of the bus stop from the 100 block of east Olive to the 100 block of west Olive.
- Repairs to damaged concrete roadway on Foothill Blvd at Ivy Ave.
- A catch basin was installed at 2655 S. Myrtle Ave.
- Weed abatement on the center median at Mountain Ave. and Duarte Rd.
- Repaired City of Monrovia entrance sign at the southeast corner of Huntington Dr. / Fifth Ave.

UTILITIES:

Customer Service

- 32 utilities work orders were completed
- 11 shut-off notices were sent out
- 1 service request was completed
- 3 backflow devices were tested
- 5 water meters were replaced
- 3 water services were reactivated

Water Production

Water consumption is 48.2 millions gallons, an increase of approximately 10% compared to last week's reported water usage.

Department of Health Services Required Water Samples:

- 17 water system samplings
- 6 water treatment facility samplings

Staff recorded 0.25" of rain last week for a total of 16.32" for the year and 23.48" for the season.

Utility Maintenance

- 1 - 2" and 1- 4" new water service were installed
- 1 - 1" water service was repaired
- 1 - 2" water meter was installed
- 1- 1" water meter box was replaced
- 1 - 8" water main leak was repaired
- 26 Fire hydrants were maintained and flushed
- 36 water system valves were inspected and operated
- 13 underground service alert's utility location requests were completed
- 11,091 feet of sewer mains were cleaned
- 100 feet of sewer mains were video inspected

Have a great weekend!

FOR YOUR CALENDARS:

Sat., April 5, 11 to 1 p.m.

MAP 2 Block Party, 400-600 Royal Oaks

Tues., April 15, 7:30 p.m.

Regular Council Meeting

Thurs., May 1, 11:30 a.m.

Annual Volunteer Luncheon, Community Center

Mon., May 5, 5:00 p.m.

Monrovia Reads Cinco de Mayo Event, Krikorian Premier Theater

Tues., May 6, 7:30 p.m.

Regular Council Meeting

Sat., May 10, 11 to 1 p.m.

MAP 2 Block Party, 400-600 Walnut

CMO ATTACHMENTS:

Officer-involved shooting details emerge

Suspect in Monrovia incident may be linked to spree of area burglaries

By Melissa Pamer, Staff Writer

Article Launched: 03/31/2008 11:16:46 PM PDT

MONROVIA - As officials investigated the Sunday morning shooting of a police sergeant - the first Monrovia officer to be shot in the line of duty in nearly 15 years - new details emerged Monday about the man suspected of firing the gun.

The 50-year-old, 320-pound suspect allegedly shot veteran Monrovia police Sgt. Dan Verna during a gun battle in the southwest corner of the city just after midnight.

The man, whose name is being withheld pending his discharge from a hospital and booking, was shot several times after he fired on Verna, authorities said.

Officials believe he was the same man wanted in connection to recent crimes in Arcadia, Monrovia spokesman Dick Singer said.

"He's suspected of being responsible for a whole string of burglaries in Arcadia," Singer said. "If it's this guy, then he's been getting very aggressive recently."

Verna, 34, was released from Huntington Hospital in Pasadena on Sunday after being treated for two bullet wounds.

The suspect was in custody, hospitalized and in stable condition, said Detective Mark Lillienfeld of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Homicide Bureau, which is investigating the shooting.

Officials from the Arcadia Police Department and the Sheriff's Department would not confirm a link between the gunman and other crimes, saying they would wait until charges are filed and the suspect's name is released, which is likely to occur later this week.

The shootout occurred near Duarte Road and Mayflower Avenue about 12:13 a.m., soon after the suspect fled a Monrovia officer's attempt to stop him for suspicious activity, Lillienfeld said.

Backup patrols were called to contain the area, and the suspect opened fire on Verna, who had attempted to stop him. A California Highway Patrol officer was also in the line of fire, officials said.

The CHP has had a stepped-up presence in the area as part of an anti-gang taskforce that began increased patrols in late January following a series of gang-related shootings in Monrovia, Duarte and the nearby unincorporated area.

The Sunday incident is the first time since 1993 that a Monrovia officer has been shot while on duty. In the 1993 shooting, Officer John Guthrie was saved from severe injury by his bullet-proof vest, according to a Pasadena Star-News story at the time.

Verna, who began his public safety career with the department in 1995, was hit in the chin and the shoulder.

"He's doing well. He's expected to fully recover," Monrovia police Chief Roger Johnson said.

Verna and the suspect were treated across from each other in the trauma center, said Mayor Rob Hammond, who visited the sergeant at the hospital.

"It's a harrowing experience, but (Verna's) spirits were good. He obviously felt blessed," Hammond said. "Dan did a great job."

The Monrovia High School graduate started with the Police Department after completing the city's Police Explorer program, Hammond said.

Monrovia officers are each processing the shooting in their own way, Monrovia Sgt. Jaime Alfaro said. "I'm sure the event has lingering effects on us all," Alfaro said. "I believe the personnel are very resilient here... Obviously, our prayers are with the officer."

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Thomas Elias: Proposition battle about eminent domain, more

Article Launched: 03/28/2008 06:22:34 PM PDT

THE television commercials leading up to the June 4 California primary - and they will air thousands of times in all parts of the state before that vote - will tell voters this election is all about eminent domain, with the big question whether government at any level should be allowed to take property from one private owner for the purpose of selling it to another.

But this election will really be about things like rent control, new freeways and rail lines and whether the National Football League will ever return to Los Angeles.

Both major initiatives on the June ballot, Propositions 98 and 99, would restrict eminent domain, the government's right to take private property for public purposes.

Under that broad definition, the state and its cities, counties, water districts and other public entities have long been allowed to buy up property from reluctant owners. Often that property is used for highways, schools, courthouses and other purely public uses.

But many cities also use their confiscatory powers to take land from one owner and then resell it to another. Without such takings, there would be no Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles (home to the basketball Lakers and Clippers plus the hockey Kings), nor would there be an AT&T Park in San Francisco's China Basin (home of the baseball Giants). Many shopping malls would not exist, nor would some big box stores.

All these developments sit in areas local government once designated as "blighted," a requirement under California law before property taken under eminent domain can be sold off to other private owners. They also vastly increased the property tax take of the local governments involved, as the new developments exponentially upped property values of the lands involved and many properties around them. Those property tax increases, called incremental financing, don't have to be shared with outside government agencies.

The right of governments to do all this was solidified by a 2005 U.S. Supreme Court decision in a case from New London, CT. That ruling drew an almost immediate response in California, where anti-eminent domain activists tried to ban virtually all government taking of private property via the 2006 Proposition 90. When it became clear the measure would threaten road building, water projects and even some land purchases made to preserve public health, that measure lost by a narrow 52-48 percent margin.

The activists returned this year with Proposition 98, less broad in some ways than 90 was and more restrictive in others. Proposition 98 allows taking of private property only for public purposes like roads and dams.

But its attempt to eliminate all rent controls in the state goes far beyond anything tried in 90. The brainchild of the anti-tax, anti-rent control Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, 98 bans "regulation of the ownership, occupancy or use of privately-owned real property or associated property rights in order to transfer an economic benefit to one or more private persons at the expense of the property owner."

That means no regulation on rents, either in apartments or mobile home parks. "Rent regulations are as close to a physical taking as you can get," says Jon Coupal, head of the Jarvis group.

In practice, this provision would let rent controls stand until today's renters move out, just like existing rent control laws. But where today's laws in cities like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Cotati, Santa Monica and others demand that rents be limited again after a new occupant moves in, that would be forbidden by 98. There would be no limits to what a renter can be charged once his or her lease expired.

Trying to protect current laws, the League of California Cities responded with Proposition 99, which concentrates purely on private homes. It forbids state and local government from using eminent domain to acquire any owner-occupied residence and then turn it over to a private person or business. But it says nothing about apartments, commercial property or rental homes, thus leaving open most current eminent domain options.

Backers of the far more draconian Proposition 98 say the rival measure exists mainly to confuse the issue and cause voters to nix both initiatives, as they often do when unsure how to vote.

If 98 passes, chances of building a new stadium to National Football League standards in Los Angeles will be greatly diminished. So would the chances for new developments like the massive building project now rising near Staples Center.

But the mostly-poor residents of areas most likely to be taken by governments would have far more permanence. It's a classic case of the voters literally deciding the physical shape of much of California's future.

tdelias@aol.com Thomas Elias is a syndicated columnist covering California issues. He lives in Santa Monica.

Message must be loud, clear

Article Launched: 03/30/2008 09:17:11 PM PDT

EVEN if the San Gabriel Valley was like the fictional town of Who-ville and indeed, everyone from young to old spoke in unison and as loud as they could, it might not be enough to get the foothill extension of the Gold Line built.

Politics could ruin the happy ending.

The apt analogy to the No. 1 hit movie "Horton Hears A Who!" was raised in earnest by Azusa Mayor Joe Rocha last week during a remarkable show of bipartisan support for the light-rail extension long-planned to go from east Pasadena to Claremont and possibly all the way to Ontario Airport.

In the movie it took literally everyone in town to raise their voices in order to be heard by the powerful leaders on the other side. It will take that and more for the San Gabriel Valley to get this line built.

Sometimes, however unfair, it seems like the San Gabriel Valley - with its almost 2million population - is seen as that tiny speck of dust by the power brokers from Los Angeles who control the MTA board which has held the "local match" in abeyance needed to unloose federal transportation funds.

It can easily be said that SGV politicians are doing all they can. Democratic Reps. Hilda Solis and Adam Schiff, as well as Republican senior Valley delegation member David Dreier sat in the dirt lot at Citrus Avenue and Foothill Boulevard (near the site of one of two proposed Azusa stations) in a show of bipartisan support Wednesday. They gave speeches and stressed the need for the extension of the Gold Line to remove traffic from local freeways and smog from local airways. Too, in attendance were local mayors from Azusa, Monrovia and Glendora whose cities are part of a \$2 billion public-private investment in retail/housing projects approved for development along the future line. Cities have anted up \$11million. Not only is the right-of-way cleared, but stations are being built.

Despite all the pleading and bipartisan embracing, local officials must wait and hope they have the votes of a majority of MTA members to put up about \$80 million - or 1/2 of a percent of the County Rail and Transitway Capital budget - enough to pay our share and leverage up to \$320 million from the federal government to build the first leg of the extension.

It is our belief that it will take a cacophony of voices from ordinary San Gabriel Valley residents to reach the ears of Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and his three other appointees on the Metro board, who would then join with others in voting for funding.

It will take those students from Citrus College, Azusa Pacific University, Mt. Sierra College and the University of La Verne who have launched a Web site and marketing campaign to make their voices heard. They're on their way to signing up 1,500 pledged riders in their Iwillride.org campaign.

And it will take those future Gold Line riders and others to show up at the April 8 meeting at 6 p.m. at Potrero Heights Elementary School, 8026 E. Hill Drive, in Rosemead, to tell the Metro staff to move the Gold Line Foothill Extension into the agency's final planning document.

If that doesn't happen, in the words of Rep. Schiff, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) "... will send those federal dollars to somewhere else in the state or country ... that has the political will that is stronger than ours."

Lawmakers urge Metro to OK extension

By Fred Ortega, Staff Writer

Article Launched: 03/26/2008 11:06:54 PM PDT

• **Photo Gallery:** [Gold Line Station](#)

AZUSA - Local officials on Wednesday urged the Metro Board - and Antonio Villaraigosa in particular - to put the Gold Line extension on a critical funding list, with many saying the Los Angeles mayor alone has the power to sink or save the project. The comments came during an unprecedented, bi-partisan gathering of federal and local officials, who toured the sites of future stations along the proposed 24-mile, \$1.4 billion light rail project.

In order for the project to receive hundreds of millions of dollars in federal matching funds, the Metro Board must first put the Gold Line extension on its long-range transportation plan. The board could have put it on its draft version of the plan in January but refused to do so.

The board has until June to finalize the long-range plan - and include the Gold Line in it. "The MTA has ignored this project," said Rep. Hilda Solis, D-El Monte, who was joined by colleagues Rep. David Dreier, R-San Dimas, Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Pasadena and mayors from throughout the valley on the tour Wednesday.

"All we are asking is for a half-percent of MTA's total capital budget and inclusion in the long-range plan to allow us to leverage as much as \$320 million in federal funds," she said.

Solis, Dreier and other officials met with Villaraigosa before the January Metro Board meeting and had expressed confidence that the mayor would support inclusion of the project in the long-range plan. "I was very surprised because he had supported it," said Dreier, adding that Villaraigosa's support is crucial.

That is because as Los Angeles' mayor, he controls a total of four votes - himself and three appointees - on the 13-member Metro Board, said Duarte Councilman John Fasana, himself a Metro Board member. "If he brings his votes, we are there," said Fasana, who along with county Supervisor Michael Antonovich supports the project.

Villaraigosa's office did not return calls seeking comment.

Schiff said he believes the mayor wants the project to happen and thinks the line's possible connection to the Ontario Airport will directly benefit his own constituents. He believes Villaraigosa did not try to put the project on the draft long-range plan in January because it is still short on votes: Even with Villaraigosa, Fasana and Antonovich on board, the extension would still need one more supporter on the Metro Board in order to secure a majority. "I think the mayor wants to make this happen and he needs to make sure he has all the votes he needs," Schiff said. "Making sure the line gets out to Ontario is crucial for that to happen."

The agency charged with building the line is in the midst of a \$500,000 study examining just that possibility. The line is currently slated to end in Claremont.

Solis, a longtime ally of Villaraigosa, shied away from calling out the mayor directly. Instead, she urged the public to write letters to the entire Metro Board asking them to support the project.

"This project has all its environmental approvals and is ready to go," said Solis, adding that the Gold Line extension would create \$6 in jobs for every \$1 spent, remove 120 tons of carbon monoxide from the air every year and generate \$43 billion in economic benefits over the next 30 years. "But without (Metro's) support it is not going to happen," she added.

Schiff said that the time is now for the San Gabriel Valley to take advantage of hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding. "Either that, or we send this money to another area of the state or country that is better organized or has more political will," he said.

Azusa Mayor Joe Rocha was among the many leaders from cities along the foothills who spoke Wednesday in support of the project. Azusa, Monrovia, Duarte, Glendora and other cities have more than \$2 billion in planned transit-oriented development along the proposed extension.

"These projects are contingent on the Gold Line being extended," said Rocha. "I ask the MTA: please don't leave us standing at the station."

Also present at the event, which drew about 70 people, were representatives from local colleges, including Citrus College and Azusa Pacific University, and area business leaders.

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'Red wigglers' help Monrovia get rid of trash

By Melissa Pamer, Staff Writer

Article Launched: 03/28/2008 10:55:16 PM PDT

• **Photo Gallery:** [Worm caretaker](#)

MONROVIA - Deep in the bowels of City Hall, there's a dirty little secret.

Well, it's not so secret anymore. But it is dirty.

Hundreds of "red wiggler" earthworms are eating away at the city's trash, turning it pound by pound into a nutrient-rich soil supplement.

Greg Garabedian, City Hall's "resident worm caretaker" has launched a "feed the worms campaign," he joked Friday.

Peeling back a layer of wet newspaper, Garabedian revealed a wriggling mass of red worms struggling through bits of carrot, tea bags and coffee grounds.

"This gives you a much more natural view of things. It's the way nature breaks things down," said the Finance Department employee, dropping cut-up pieces of banana peel into the earthy-smelling mix.

The worms' home is a new plastic compost bin in the City Hall's basement, next to boxes of Christmas ornaments and dusty documents.

The experiment first began last summer with the Fire Department's "vermacompost" bin, and the Public Works Department and City Hall recently followed suit with worm factories of their own.

The project is part of Monrovia's effort to reduce its trash under environmental goals adopted last year - and to promote composting to residents, officials said.

"Before we push all these programs into the public realm, we want to set a good example," said Heather Maloney, who supervises the city's Environmental Services Division.

The city sells the worm bins to residents for \$55. A pound of red wigglers - which can eat their weight in food scraps each day - costs \$20.

Officials hope that worm bins will reduce trash sent from city offices to landfills by about 1,000 pounds per year.

Garabedian was moved to become worm caretaker when he realized the impact it would have.

"I was interested in the fact that (worm composting) is a natural process, one that you can actually see - instead of throwing (food waste) in the trash, having it go straight to the Puente Hills Landfill," Garabedian said.

He feeds the worms twice per week with food scraps and other organic refuse recovered from buckets in City Hall's break room. In return, the worms will produce not only a rich soil, but a "worm tea" from condensation within the bin.

The diluted liquid - essentially an organic fertilizer - has perked city office plants right up, Maloney said.

For now, the operation is too small to have much benefit beyond potted plants within city buildings, she said.

But officials are also researching the possibility of offering separate food-scrap pickup for large-scale municipal composting. Cities such as Oakland distribute pails for home collection of food scraps, which are set at the curb in the yard-trimming cart.

Meanwhile, Garabedian said, city employees are already saying they can't wait to get their hands on some worm poop.

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