

COUNTY UPDATE: Month celebrates county government

By Helen M. Thomson and Jim Provenza

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Four years ago, the first in a series of columns on Yolo County services and programs appeared here, and it went something like this ...

“Did you know that Yolo County provides more direct and indirect services to the residents of its cities than the cities provide? This comes as a result of the vast array of services provided by counties in general. The list of services is extensive, including: restaurant inspections, pesticide regulation, county parks, property tax roll, building permits, domestic violence and sexual assault prosecution, emergency response, gas pump calibration inspections, immunizations, child support services, road maintenance, animal shelter, veterans services, library services, day care licensing ... and the list goes on.”

Believe it or not, even after 48 columns devoted to programs and services provided by Yolo County, we've only scratched the surface. There's much more to come in the months ahead, but for now, we stop in the month of April (National County Government Month) to reflect on the breadth of services provided by county government across the nation.

National County Government Month is designed to acknowledge the 3,068 counties across the nation that provide a plethora of essential public services, ultimately serving 300 million Americans. This year, the essential role county governments play in America's health care system is being highlighted.

County governments are unique in their responsibility to provide health services, including mental health services and substance abuse treatment through public hospitals and clinics, local public health departments, long-term care facilities, health services for indigent and uninsured residents, and myriad collaborations with other health care providers.

In Yolo County, the services provided by our Public Health and Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health departments are too many to list. In the Public Health Department, some services are specific to Yolo County's indigent population and those incarcerated in the county jail or Juvenile Hall, while other services, such as restaurant and swimming pool inspections, impact each and every one of us.

As many witnessed this year, the department played an integral role in reducing the spread of novel H1N1 Influenza. Similar programs are in place to address other communicable diseases such as tuberculosis. The Environmental Health Division of the department plays a significant role in ensuring our drinking water is safe and waste is properly handled. Again, we've just scratched the surface on the services provided by the Public Health Department.

Services provided by the Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Department are primarily focused on seriously mentally ill adults and severely emotionally disturbed children. Services for those who need care include crisis evaluation, psychiatric hospitalization, residential care, screening, diagnosis, treatment and peer counseling for seniors. Alcohol and drug programs are in place for perinatal drug treatment, felony drug court and chemical dependency, along with prevention programs for teens and adults. And the list goes on.

In these difficult economic times, the county is grappling with achieving a balanced and sustainable budget while still continuing to provide important services to the residents of Yolo County. Difficult decisions lie ahead that will affect all county programs.

During April, National County Government Month, please take time to visit our Web site — <http://www.yolocounty.org> — to learn more about Yolo County government and the budget process. Meanwhile, this column will continue to be devoted to Yolo County's many programs and the approximately 1,350 county employees who provide these services on a daily basis.

— Helen M. Thomson and Jim Provenza represent Davis on the Yolo County Board of Supervisors.