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MARCH'S FEATURED PROGRAM:

How great are our schools?

Demystifying the Numbers

Clearing Up the Misconceptions

Every time **Dr. Connie Fish** reads headlines and newspaper stories about declining test scores that chronicle the demise of the education system she sees red. "I get upset," says the former teacher, principal and assistant superintendent.

The reports, in her eyes, are "bad information" and misrepresent what is actually taking place in Fallbrook and California schools.

If anything, students today are being challenged more than they were 20 years ago and teachers and schools are being held to higher and higher standards and expectations every year. There are many more things right with our schools and educational system than there are wrong, Fish explained. "Sometimes we forget that we are the only country in the world that makes education available to everybody," she told those attending the March 19 meeting of the Fallbrook Revitalization Advisory Council. "Our schools are the best in the world and that is a fact." Separating fact from fiction when it comes to education is not easy. Over the past 20 years, the curriculum in California has been standardized and the classroom standards raised. The biggest changes have been in math and reading comprehension. Math that many parents learned in 9th grade is now being taught in 5th grade. In the past, kids were taught to read books. Today students are taught how to read for information. The reality is, Fish explained, that you need algebra to repair a car and no good jobs exist for those who don't graduate from high school. Test scores have created the biggest confusion. The Academic Performance Index, or API, used in California sets growth targets for each school and district. But the results are relative because the targets keep going up each year and schools are compared to other

schools. If a school fails to meet its state growth target of 800, it's considered failing. That doesn't mean a school hasn't shown growth on a year- to-year basis. It just means it failed to reach its state target. For example, Fallbrook Union High School District, which includes Fallbrook and Ivy/Oasis high schools, had an API score of 662 in 2003. In 2008 it reached 722. Along with API, there's also the federal No Child Left Behind program, which has its own measure of annual yearly progress. All these test scores reflect a complicated set of information and circumstances and are not easy to evaluate. Fish also told the audience that it is wrong to assume that increased numbers of kids who learned, or are learning, English as a second language (English Learners) result in a dummying down of the curriculum. "That's not true," she said. It is sad to say that many parents who pull their kids out of public school in favor of private school do not want their children to be exposed to diversity, she says. Unfortunately, that is a misguided approach that does not reflect reality. "This is the real world," Fish said of the public school system. "These are the people your children are going to have to deal with." Oftentimes, English Learners turn out to be the best students. "It takes a lot of brainpower to learn a second language," she notes. Fish has a long history in California education. Since taking her first teaching position in 1968, she has been a classroom teacher, Curriculum Coordinator, Resource teacher, Assistant Principal, and Principal. In addition, Connie served as an Assistant Superintendent for 13 years, including five years in Fallbrook.

California and Fallbrook test scores are even more remarkable when you consider that California ranks almost last in the nation in per student classroom spending and has the largest class sizes in the nation.

Despite the challenges, Fish said she would not hesitate to send her kids or grandchildren to public schools in California.

She is currently an adjunct professor for Point Loma Nazarene University in the administrative credential program and an education consultant coaching principals in program improvement schools. She holds an Ed.D. in Policy, Planning, and Administration from the University of Southern California.

For inquiring minds, answers to the sample tests Fish handed out.

Math: 65: A; 66: A; 67: A; 68: D.

Reading: 6: D; 7: D; 8: C; 9: A; 10: C.

OTHER REPORTS:

Supervisor's Corner: *Landmark County Vegetation Management Report*

Approved

The San Diego County Board of Supervisors approved the first comprehensive vegetation management program for county-owned land. The plan, a blueprint for vegetation management, covers all methods of managing brush; controlled burns, mastication, hand clearing, plant and tree removal, and fire safe landscaping. It addresses the most fire-prone and high priority areas in need of clearing and thinning. **Fifth District Supervisor Bill Horn**, who introduced the concept nearly a year ago, praised the cooperative efforts of county staff, fire-fighting agencies, community leaders and environmental groups. "The new vegetation management report moves us forward and makes way for a tremendous public safety improvement for every citizen in San Diego County, especially those who live in North and East County where the fire danger is the highest." The report also addresses the challenges of developments adjacent to open spaces. Many wildfires begin in rural areas that are thick with dead, diseased or dying brush and trees and then move into residential neighborhoods

A 'Glint of Stability' for Local Housing Market

Chris Hasvold with Coldwell Banker Landmark Group is heartened by what he is seeing in local newspaper stories and area housing markets. National real estate statistics do not reflect what is happening in the West, more specifically Northern San Diego County. In the western states, sales are growing at a double-digit rate. The region, he said is in the midst of its eighth straight monthly sales increase after 48 months of declines, according to Multiple Listing Service (MLS) reports. "I see the glint of stability," he said. "That's big news for us." He said sales of bank-owned, or REO, properties today represents a smaller percentage of overall home sales that they in previous months. The lower end of the housing market remains robust. Hasvold said there were 383 active properties on the books in Bonsall and Fallbrook, including 133 that were priced more than \$750,000. He pointed out, however, that of the 94 properties in escrow, only one is priced above \$750,000.

Here and there... Janice Bricker with the **Fallbrook Gem & Mineral Society** said her group will take part in the Avocado Festival on April 19 and Fallbrook Area Visitors Bureau Wine & "A Bite" Art Walk this summer... Judee Smith with the **Fallbrook Area Visitors Bureau** is getting ready to restart its popular Wine & "A Bite" Art Walk on June 20 from 5-7 p.m. This is the first in a series of four events that features food, wine and art in historic downtown Fallbrook. Food will provided by La Caseta, Rio Rico, Lace Apron, Pala Casino, Pala Mesa and the Sweet Sicilian Bakery. Fallbrook Winery will provide a taste of wine for participants at each stop. Cost is \$20 per person in advance, \$25 at the door, \$15 for

designated drivers in advance, \$20 at the door. To find out more call (877) 451-3282.... Harry Christianson said the **Fallbrook Planning Group** has forwarded a strong recommendation to CalTrans that the Route 76/I-15 should be south of the San Luis Rey River... Jackie Heyneman (**Keep Fallbrook Clean & Green and Fallbrook Land Conservancy**) is working on an environmental educational program with Ivy School at Live Oak. She said there will be tree planting on Old Stage Road and weed control... Marlene Rantanen, **Fallbrook Center for the Arts**, said the Fallbrook Art Center will host the Fallbrook Art Association open juried show from Mar 27-Apr 12; May 2-3 is the 16th Annual Reflections of Nature National Wildlife Art Show; and May 17-June 28 the 13th Annual Gourd & Fiber Art Show.... Gordon Stone said the Fallbrook Community Center will hold a health fair on April 4, Easter Egg Hunt on April 11 and Challenge of the Bands on May 2. More information can be found on www.sdparcs.org.... Tom Causey, code enforcement officer with the **County of San Diego** is a busy man. He handled 244 cases last month, adding to a growing backlog. He can close 80-100 cases per month.

THIS MONTH'S FEATURED PROGRAM:

Issues Facing the Elected Fallbrook Community Planning Group presented by Chairman **Jim Russell** on April 16 at 11 a.m.

The Fallbrook Revitalization Advisory Council was formed by San Diego County 20 years ago to serve as a forum for community organizations where information about important Fallbrook issues could be exchanged. The networking group, which is made up key members of the municipal, private, non-profit and for-profit organizations, serves as an advisory body to the San Diego County Board of Supervisors.

The Fallbrook Revitalization Advisory Council meets on the third Thursday of every month at the Fallbrook Public Utilities District office at 990 E. Mission Road. Meetings are open to the public.

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