

# NEW LEGISLATORS TAKE THE HELM

In 2008, the citizens of Turlock elected four first-time legislators to office. California District 26 Assemblyman Bill Berryhill (R – Ceres), Stanislaus County District 2 Supervisor Vito Chiesa, and Turlock City Councilmembers Amy Bublak and Mary Jackson are all now tasked with the tricky business of representing the diverse interests of Turlockers — and navigating the waters of the current financial crisis.

First to be elected, on June 3, 2008, was Chiesa, a Hughson farmer, former president of the Stanislaus County Fair Board and Stanislaus County Farm Bureau, past director for the Modesto Chamber of Commerce, and ex-state director for California Farm Bureau. Chiesa defeated former Stanislaus County Sheriff Les Weidman, and was seated as Supervisor on Jan. 6, replacing the deceased Tom Mayfield.

“I think for the most part (being a County Supervisor) is pretty much what I expected,” Chiesa said. “It’s pretty overwhelming because of the committee assignments they give you. Being a part of 13 committees is something you never really prepare for.”

Despite the challenges of the economy and budget cuts at the county level, Chiesa says some good news is starting to roll in. But while federal funds could be of some use in creating new jobs, houses are beginning to sell, and investors are interested in coming to the county, Chiesa still thinks some hard work needs to be done as the economy begins to bottom out.

“I am enjoying these challenging times,” Chiesa said. “I think it’s a great time for government to refocus on its core mission in all departments, and we will find our core mission by the time we’re done with all this.”

Turlock’s new state representative, Berryhill, was a grape farmer and 11-year member of the Ceres Unified School Board before earning his post on Nov. 4, 2008, by defeating John Eisenhut. According to Berryhill, local businesses should do their best to avoid the sort of gridlock he has seen since traveling to Sacramento.

“I have not seen one thing happening on the state level that local businesses should try to emulate unless they want to go into bankruptcy,” Berryhill said. “Businesses have budgets they have to adhere to with real consequences for failure. It’s just not that way for bureaucrats and state government; that’s why the system is broken.”

Berryhill has been meeting with small businesses regularly in his Stockton district office to entertain suggestions on how to fix the state and create jobs. While his focus thus far has been on water and education — both crucial to Valley employers — Berryhill has also taken issue with the State’s planned budget solution of raising taxes and recently co-sponsored legislation to cut legislators’ pay if a budget is not passed on time.

“Increasing taxes on hard-working California families is not a solution to fixing this economy,” Berryhill said. “I don’t see how making it harder for families who are having a hard time paying their bills each month will help create jobs and opportunity.

“I think things will begin turning around when there is finally an understanding in this state that you cannot over regulate and tax the productive part of the economy and expect no negative consequences,” he continued. “Bureaucrats will not be the ones who bring California out of recession, it will be the entrepreneurs and small businesses creating private sector jobs that will make the difference.”

New Turlock City Councilmember Bublak, a Modesto Police Officer and former Turlock Planning Commissioner, says her goal in office is just to represent her constituents the best she can.

“All throughout the election process and through now I have no agenda, and that’s probably the most fortuitous thing because I would be disappointed that I couldn’t do it because of the economy,” Bublak said. “... I just want to make sure I’m doing the best for our community.”

Having just worked through a difficult mid-year budget update, Bublak expressed her thanks for City labor unions that agreed to take pay cuts to keep Turlockers employed. Bublak has also been sure to keep her eye on City spending, asking questions at every turn whether money could be better spent in Turlock, such as in a recent initiative to hire an outside firm to do some Turlock landscaping.

“I brought it back and said, ‘Wait a minute why would we be doing this, why wouldn’t we keep the services here?’”



Bill Berryhill



Vito Chiesa



Amy Bublak

STORY BY ALEX CANTATORE