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Serving the Indian Wells Valley since 1926

Proposed court closure now off the table

By John Watkins
The Daily Independent

The proposed closure of Ridgecrest Superior Court is off the table. But problems still persist as to staffing issues and must be addressed. After hearing an outcry from Ridgecrest residents and city manager Ron Strand, Presiding Judge Colette Humphrey reached out to assure Strand and city council mem-

bers there was no longer any intention to close the Ridgecrest court facility and move it to Tehachapi.

In response to Strand, Judge Humphrey noted:

"I wanted to update you to let you know I spoke with my assistant presiding judge and we both recognize the importance of continuing to provide access to the courts to the citizens of Ridgecrest and the surrounding area. In addition

to criminal and civil matters, the Ridgecrest Court also handles family law and child support cases.

"Those are some of the most sensitive cases, with significant impact on people's lives. We want to make it as easy as we can for people to handle their family law matters. We are not intending to close the Ridgecrest Court. We will keep working to find employees to staff the court so that

we can keep it running.

"We are still talking about asking to build the second East Kern Courthouse closer to the Tehachapi area, rather than Mojave. That would allow us to pull from Bakersfield for employees. It also would allow us to handle Ridgecrest felony jury trials that are currently sent to Bakersfield for trial.

"Again, that is just an informal discussion of what we think would be the best use of

court resources. I wanted to send this email to reassure you that we are committed to providing services for the people of Ridgecrest and East Kern."

In a separate email to Mayor Bruen and others, Judge Humphrey noted:

"There really have been no committees or groups discussing this. When I met with my assistant presiding judge

See COURT, A6

Winds blow dust, close highways



High winds battered the Indian Wells Valley Monday, filling the sky with dust and forcing multiple highway closures. As many as 12 semi trucks were blown onto their sides on Highways 14 and 395. The official top wind gust at the Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake airfield was 51 mph, but a Bakersfield TV station weather report claimed wind gusts of 83 mph at Jawbone Canyon, 75 at Mojave, and 102 at Indian Wells Canyon.

PHOTO BY KYARRA HARRIS/MOJAVE DESERT NEWS

City soon to pay more for KCFD

By John Watkins
The Daily Independent

Kern County reached agreement with three communities for increased fire prevention costs, bringing an end to negotiations that began in July 2020 with all Kern County cities.

The total amount of costs for Delano and McFarland went up more than \$1.6 million for services through 2028. Delano absorbed most of that number with \$1.1 million more each year.

Now its Ridgecrest's turn to bite the bullet and pay what the county calls its fair share. What that fair share will be is yet to be known. However, a good idea may come after City Manager Ron Strand and County Fire Chief Aaron Duncan meet on Thursday.

"We have the basics of an agree-

See KCFD, A6

PUBLISHER'S PEN

Time to think of what we want the city of Ridgecrest to be

Ridgecrest residents have always supported "self-help" when it comes to public safety needs. First it was Measure L, then Measure V. Both were dedicated funds for roads and police.

A recreation based tax proposal was soundly defeated due to a lot of mistrust on past council actions when it came to funding youth sports facilities and improvements. Now with the city working



John Watkins

with youth organizations and putting dollars toward parks and amenities, that whole trust dynamic may have changed.

But let's put that aside for now and look at the city as a whole. We need

improved parks! We need improved youth facilities! And oh yes, we need to maintain, or even increase, our fire protection. Let's focus on fire protection.

Fire protection is going to cost the city more in the next five/six years just to maintain what is in effect now. When the soon to be new contract is in place for county fire protection the price tag will increase a minimum of \$1.2 million per year through FY 2028.

That's no chump

change by any imagination. Oh yes, you can save money by closing one of the two stations. That's not a business option at any level (fire insurance will go up for all and growth will come to a standstill).

So one of two things are going to happen when it comes budget time.

• The council will implement layoffs, cut services (police included) and the town will take a downward spiral that may not be revers-

ible.

• Or, council will put a ballot measure to the voters and let them decide what level of fire protection they want and what type of community they want to live in.

While we will soon know the "devil in the details" info on the

new fire protection agreement, it's time we take a look down the financial road and start a discussion of what we want Ridgecrest to be. A vibrant growing community with a modernized China Lake at our doorsteps, or a city that will fade off into the sunset.

Have 401(k) questions? Let's talk.



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