

LOCAL

Local veteran continues to serve as advocate for youth in foster care



Shelly Henderson of Menifee is a Court Appointed Special Advocate with Voices for Children. Valley News/Courtesy photo

MENIFEE – For Veterans Day, Voices for Children is honoring its Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteers who have served in the armed forces, including Shelly Henderson of Menifee.

During her four years in the U.S. Marine Corps, Henderson served tours in Okinawa, Japan,

and at the Pentagon in Washington. After leaving the military, she earned her master's degree in forensic psychology and relocated to Riverside County. She started looking for volunteer opportunities that combined her education with her passion for helping children, which stems from losing her own

mother at a young age.

"I knew there had to be a program where I could be that constant person for someone because I know how it feels to not have that," Henderson said.

Henderson found Voices for Children, the only organization authorized by the courts in Riverside County to provide CASA volunteers to youth in foster care. CASA volunteers get to know their assigned child or sibling group so they can advocate for them in court, school, medical settings and more to ensure their needs are being met.

In 2018, Henderson completed Advocate University, Voices for Children's training course for all new volunteers, and officially became a CASA. Since then, she has advocated for five teenagers in Riverside County foster care. She is currently matched with a 15-year-old girl.

When Henderson first started working with children in foster care, she observed that they were in constant survival mode. She aims to provide her youth with a safe, judgment-free zone where

they can "just breathe and be themselves."

"I always tell them, my goal is to walk away learning something new about you and us learning something new together," Henderson said.

Besides spending quality time together, CASAs make sure youth have everything they need to thrive. This relationship involves having regular contact with parents, caregivers, social workers, attorneys, school officials, therapists and other members of a child's support team. Henderson said the communication and networking skills she developed in the military help her today when interacting with the people and professionals on her case.

Henderson encouraged her fellow veterans to look into becoming CASAs because they already possess the right traits. They have a heart for service, are mission-focused and have a mindset that no one gets left behind.

"The military considers community service as a way of thanking the communities where we reside," Henderson said. "It's important

to understand the dynamics of the communities you patronize to understand where resources are needed the most."

Founded in 1980, Voices for Children transforms the lives of abused, neglected and abandoned children in foster care in San Diego and Riverside counties by providing them with trained, volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocates. Voices for Children believes every child deserves a safe and permanent home and strives to provide a CASA volunteer to every child in the foster care system who needs one. Last year, VFC CASAs and staff served more than 3,400 children in foster care across San Diego and Riverside Counties.

On any given day, there are more than 4,000 children in Riverside County foster care, and many are on the waitlist for a CASA volunteer. To learn more about how to make a difference, sign up for an online Volunteer Information Session at <http://speakupnow.org/volunteer>.

Submitted by Voice for Children.

Murrieta Police Department receives \$115,000 grant to deter unsafe behaviors, increase safety on roads

MURRIETA – The Murrieta Police Department will increase patrols throughout the community and provide other traffic safety programs to help reduce the number of serious injuries and deaths on city roadways thanks to a \$115,000 grant.

"This grant funding allows us to support our continuing traffic safety efforts in the community," Murrieta Police Department Chief

Tony Conrad said. "Our intent is to curtail the most unlawful and dangerous driving behaviors that put people at risk and create a safe environment for everyone traveling our roadways."

The grant will provide additional programs and resources for Murrieta PD, including DUI checkpoints and patrols focused on stopping suspected impaired drivers; high visibility distracted

driving enforcement operations targeting drivers in violation of California's hands-free cell phone law and enforcement operations focused on the most dangerous driving behaviors that put the safety of people biking or walking at risk.

The grant will also allow enforcement operations focused on top violations that cause collisions: speeding, failure to yield, stop sign

and/or red-light violations and improper turning or lane changes; collaborative enforcement efforts with neighboring allied agencies and officer training and/or recertification for Standard Field Sobriety Test, Advanced Roadside Impaired Driving Enforcement and Drug Recognition Expert.

The grant program will run through September 2023.

Funding for this program was

provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

For more information about the Murrieta Police Department, visit their website at <http://www.MurrietaPolice.org>.

Submitted by Murrieta Police Department.

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2003 Settlement Agreement and the 2005 Cooperative Agreement between the city of Temecula and Riverside County.

The 42 square mile area borders Temecula and Murrieta on the south, Menifee and Murrieta on the west, Hemet to the north and east.

Temecula Councilmember Maryann Edwards reminded the council that in 2005 Temecula won four legal cases against Riverside County concerning a similar issue with Menifee's and Murrieta's housing plans that required them to provide the possible environmental impacts on Temecula, which again is the same question with the Winchester Community Plan.

She argued that the only way the proposed traffic from the plan could get to San Diego County reasonably would be on Winchester Road.

"It's the only one they might use," she said.

She indicated that the huge amount of traffic "would destroy"

all of Temecula's I-215 interchanges.

Luke Wilson, Temecula deputy city manager, told the council that the county's plan "is not adequate."

"It has an unclear project description of where it begins and where it ends," he said.

Mayor Matt Rahn said after hearing the report. "This is a massive project that cannot sustain the size of a city like Temecula and an infrastructure that is capable of moving 100,000 plus to the area.... All that we have built to maintain our identity and quality of life in Temecula is put at risk because of this project. This is a massive issue. The county is making some disingenuous decisions right now, he said.

"There is a lot of deception going on because they are not being clear of what they might do. It's dangerous," Rahn said.

Collins said that the proposed "Winchester Community Plan Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report" was discovered by staff Friday, Aug. 12.

"Staff completed an initial review of the document and found it to be woefully inadequate as an informational document, key information necessary to allow for meaningful analysis of the impacts was excluded or omitted," Collins said. "The city's primary concern is the incomplete and undecipherable project description, the project description includes a discussion of existing land uses and land use designations within the proposed Winchester Community Plan, but it does not include any mention of the actual proposed Winchester Community Plan policies or include the proposed land use and circulation plan."

According to the report. "the project would result in significant and unavoidable impacts to air quality and greenhouse gas emissions with the PEIR analysis concluding that "no mitigation measures are required."

Temecula staff said it appears to circumvent the required mitigation efforts of CEQA. The PEIR concluded that there will be significant and unavoidable impacts to: "Noise and vibration, transportation and agriculture and forestry services all of which the city cannot analyze accurately due to the lacking project description."

In conclusion Collins found that "In developing the Winchester Community Plan and Draft PEIR, the county has completely ignored its obligations under the settlement and cooperative agreements. The development already approved and contemplated under the pro-

posed Winchester Community Plan and other proposed development projects will directly result in adverse traffic impacts upon the city, the Winchester Community Plan Area and the cities surrounding the Winchester Community Plan Area (Murrieta, Menifee, Wildomar, Lake Elsinore, Canyon Lake, Hemet and Perris.

"There is no plan to finance the remaining major arterial roads described in a cooperative agreement that are needed to mitigate the traffic impacts of residential units in the area under the existing (county) general plan. The county has not conducted a freeway study (as required by the settlement and cooperative agreement) nor come up with a traffic mitigation plan for the additional 33,000 residential units in the new Winchester Community Plan," Collins said.

The report continued, "The city of Temecula is seriously concerned that the nature of development and the seemingly blind eye turned toward the requirements of CEQA and the settlement and cooperative agreements will result in dramatic traffic impacts to the city and surrounding communities from which the region may never recover. If development in the I-215 policy area were allowed to continue unmitigated, the negative impacts to the quality of life enjoyed by the residents of Temecula would be forever altered and decades of proactive and strategic transportation planning work and infrastructure construction completed by the city would be entirely undermined."

The fiscal impacts to Temecula could not be easily calculated "due to the indecipherable project description, omission of land use tables, outdated assumptions and modeling software. However, the impacts would be substantial in both transportation facility expansion and increased maintenance costs. Currently there is no identified funding for transportation facility construction or maintenance associated with the inevitable impacts of the proposed county of Riverside development projects," according to the report.

The council, after discussing the issue, received and filed the report and were looking to gain a better insight from the county on the proposed Winchester Community Plan. The plan also calls for commercial, industrial, a revitalized downtown, mixed use and open space.

The Menifee City council also read a report this past week about the Winchester Community Plan and Menifee possibly making that land area a sphere of influence and urged a meeting between those in Winchester, hoping to make it a city, the county and Menifee on the impacts of the project to its neighbors like themselves and Murrieta.

Andy Domenigoni was at the Menifee City Council meeting and is among the proponents of the Winchester Community Plan effort and cityhood. His family has owned property in the valley since the 1800s.

Tony Ault can be reached by email at tault@redermedia.com.

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