

## **County coalition takes aim at asthma**

By Ken Carlson, Bee Staff Writer

Modesto Bee, Thursday, May 11, 2006

Amid one of the more miserable dust and pollen seasons in recent memory, health advocates continue to push asthma toward the top of the public health agenda in Stanislaus County.

Members of the Stanislaus County Asthma Coalition convinced the county Board of Supervisors and city councils of Modesto and other cities to declare May as Asthma Awareness Month.

It was a symbolic gesture but will serve as a springboard for efforts to address the illness that afflicts an estimated 16,000 children and 48,000 adults in the county, coalition members said.

According to the California Health Interview Survey for 2003, the estimated number of children who have been diagnosed with asthma in Merced and San Joaquin counties is higher than the statewide rate. Asthma also occurs in Stanislaus, Merced and San Joaquin county adults at higher than the statewide rate.

It is less prevalent in children and adults in Tuolumne and other Sierra foothill counties than the statewide percentage.

Dr. John Walker, public health officer for Stanislaus County, said that cleaning the air would help to bring down the occurrence of asthma in the Northern San Joaquin Valley.

But he leaves the big solution to the federal Environmental Protection Agency, the state Air Resources Board and San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

### **New residents unaware**

The Stanislaus County Health Services Agency, which is part of the 60-member asthma coalition, strives to educate people to know what triggers asthma attacks and helps them manage the potentially deadly illness.

Some of the families who relocate to valley counties are not aware it's a hotbed of airborne particles and spores that can set off attacks. Symptoms of asthma include shortness of breath, chest tightness, coughing and wheezing.

Dr. Wallace Carroll, a Modesto allergist and chairman of the coalition, said he has met plenty of people who did not have a family history of allergies before they moved here.

"They develop allergies, and that can turn into asthma," he said. "They will start waking up at night with asthma symptoms."

The coalition has held its annual Asthma Fair in Modesto and Turlock in the past, but chose Newman this year partly because of its population of new residents.

The free event on Saturday at Von Renner Elementary School will have the theme "Surfing to Good Health." It will feature asthma screenings, information booths and presentations. Prizes such as a surfboard, surfing lessons and a skateboard will be given away.

The coalition, made up of local agencies, health providers and concerned individuals, has spearheaded other efforts to address asthma:

It promoted "asthma friendly schools" by educating school staffs in the county to recognize the symptoms in children and make accommodations.

Organized a program in which 68 schools and 13 Head Start sites in the county raise flags to inform parents, students and school employees about the quality of the air.

Teamed up with Sutter Gould Medical Foundation to hire an asthma educator to work with patients and do outreach in the community. Kelly Hughes, who has been a respiratory therapist at Memorial Medical Center, recently accepted the two-year position.

Studies have suggested that soot, dust, pollen and other air pollutants contribute to the prevalence of asthma in the San Joaquin Valley.

A heavy rain season, which extended well into the spring, boosted the growth of grasses and other pollen producers in the valley. Although the rain delayed the suffering for sensitive people, the sneezing and coughing commenced soon after the storms let up last month.

Pollen counts for grasses and trees have been at the top of the range this week, according to the National Allergy Bureau.

### **A valley epidemic, study says**

In a 2004 study, "Struggling to Breathe," the Central California Children's Institute of Fresno reported that asthma is an epidemic in the valley.

The study said that environmental policy, agricultural activities, population growth and freeway traffic should be considered in developing ways to address the health issue.

Carroll said that the coalition is keeping its focus on education. This week, it is concentrating on getting people to attend the Asthma Fair.

Carroll, a longtime surfer, got a Southern California business, Cool Board, to donate a surfboard to give away. And he lined up steel drum artist Ferguson Glasgow of the Bay Area to perform.

"We hope that lots of young people will want to come for the surfing and skateboarding stuff and stay for the health-related program," he said.

The Asthma Fair is set for 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday at Von Renner Elementary School, 1388 Patchett Drive, Newman.

## **\$10M Prize for Hydrogen Fuel Technology**

By Jim Abrams, Associated Press Writer

In the S.F. Chronicle, USA Today and other papers, Wednesday, May 10, 2006

WASHINGTON (AP) -- Scientists, inventors and entrepreneurs will be able to vie for a grand prize of \$10 million, and smaller prizes reaching millions of dollars, under House-passed legislation to encourage research into hydrogen as an alternative fuel.

Legislation creating the "H-Prize," modeled after the privately funded Ansari X Prize that resulted last year in the first privately developed manned rocket to reach space twice, passed the House Wednesday on a 416-6 vote. A companion bill is to be introduced in the Senate this week.

"This is an opportunity for a triple play," said bill sponsor Rep. Bob Inglis, R-S.C., citing benefits to national security from reduced dependence on foreign oil, cleaner air from burning pollution-free hydrogen and new jobs. "If we can reinvent the car, imagine the jobs we can create."

"Perhaps the greatest role that the H-Prize may serve is in spurring the imagination of our most valuable resource, our youth," said co-sponsor Rep. Dan Lipinski, D-Ill.

The measure would award four prizes of up to \$1 million every other year for technological advances in hydrogen production, storage, distribution and utilization. One prize of up to \$4 million would be awarded every second year for the creation of a working hydrogen vehicle prototype.

The grand prize, to be awarded within the next 10 years, would go for breakthrough technology.

"Prizes can draw out new ideas from scientists and engineers who may not be willing or able to participate in traditional government research and development programs, while encouraging them, rather than the taxpayer, to assume the risk," said Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y.

Inglis said the Department of Energy would put together a private foundation to set up guidelines and requirements for the prizes. Anyone can participate, as long as the research is performed in the United States and the person, if employed by the government or a national lab, does the research on his own time.

He said the prize would not take away funds from any federal hydrogen programs, including the \$1.7 billion hydrogen research program that President Bush first detailed in 2003.

The Energy Department announced earlier this year that it would provide \$119 million in funding for research into hydrogen fuel cells, including \$100 million over the next four years to projects to improve components of fuel cell systems.

Several automakers have made advances in hydrogen fuel cell technology or dual gas-hydrogen engines, but such vehicles are still very expensive and there's no viable infrastructure of fueling stations.

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The bill is H.R. 5143

On the Net: <http://thomas.loc.gov/>

## **Air quality contest to give out prizes**

Visalia Times-Delta, Wednesday, May 10, 2006

A bike and cash are up for grabs to Tulare County students who enter a poster or essay in the fourth annual Make a Difference in Air Quality contest.

The entries must depict how their families have made a difference in air quality by carpooling, biking, walking or riding the bus.

Essays should run one or two pages and posters should be submitted on 8 1/2 by 11 inch white paper. Entries should include the contestant's name, address, grade and phone number.

Grand prize winners will receive \$500 gift cards to be used toward the purchase of new bicycles, helmets and other bicycling accessories.

Mail entries to The Lockwood Agency, 500 N. Willis St., Visalia, CA 93291 by May 19. Winners will be announced June 3.

## **Schools chief to make budget top priority**

Bakersfield Californian, Thursday, May 11, 2006

Former city schools chief Jean Fuller told *The Californian's* editorial board Wednesday she would make an on-time, balanced state budget her top priority if elected to the state Assembly.

Fuller, on unpaid leave as the superintendent of the Bakersfield City School District, is running for the Republican nomination in the 32nd Assembly District. The seat is being vacated by Kevin McCarthy, who is running for Congress.

Pointing to her background in public schools, Fuller said education costs represent half the state's expenditures, and "we're not getting our money's worth."

She emphasized her connections in the capital and her experience as a public administrator. "I know a lot of people up there and I have a lot of experience negotiating," she said.

Fuller said environmental concerns should be balanced with economic realities, and cited endangered species regulations as an example of out-of-balance rules.

She said she supported efforts to improve the valley's [air quality](#), but offered few specifics. She said she believed planned growth is vital.

When asked about the public's right of access to government activities and records, Fuller said she supported the public's right to know.

But she qualified her support for public knowledge about the salaries of individuals. "If there's a reason a person feels their safety is in danger, then there should be a mechanism for them to petition" to keep their salary secret, she said.

Fuller faces two opponents in the Republican primary: Local businessman Stan Ellis and veteran lawmaker Phil Wyman. The primary will be June 6.