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## A Conversation With Bob Cashman and Sheryl Ade of WiN

By Diane O'Malley

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The path toward Wildomar cityhood has been an arduous, hurdle-strewn journey, but the last stretch is in view.

Officially for the past five years, the Wildomar Incorporation Now (WiN) committee has been meeting on a weekly basis, organizing fundraisers and putting the pieces together to transform the tight-knit, unincorporated, rural community into a city for a multitude of reasons, but most importantly, self-determination and self-preservation.

The grassroots moneymakers totaled up to about \$81,000 to finance the conventional costs of a municipal incorporation estimated at \$100,000. Fundraising is still continuing with the Fifth Annual Casino Night on July 27 at the Diamond Club at the Storm Stadium.

The cityhood coffers were turned into the requisite war chest and emptied out when about \$40,000 was used to fight off an annexation attempt of a southern portion of Wildomar by the neighboring city of Murrieta. The heated battle which pitted neighbor against neighbor in Wildomar ended in early 2005 with Murrieta's withdrawal of the annexation pursuit.

A current annexation request was filed this January to reallocate about 250 acres from Wildomar to the city of Lake Elsinore, at the request of developer Trumark Companies of Lake Forest and



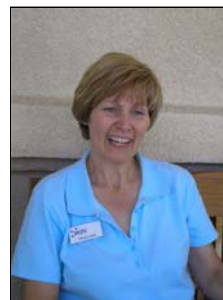
Photo: Diane O'Malley photos

"It comes back to who's going to make the decisions: us, the people who live here, or somebody in Riverside or somebody up at the state?" -Bob Cashman



Photo: Diane O'Malley photos

"A good reason why we should incorporate now is because we'd like to control how the place develops out. What sort of place is Wildomar going to become?" -Bob Cashman



Irvine. The request is headed by executive vice-president James O'Malley.

Photo: Diane O'Malley photos

"It is the time. The timing is now." –Sheryl Ade

The Trumark annexation was scheduled on the same day as the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) Wildomar incorporation decision on May 24.

Approval of the Trumark annexation would require a redrawing and resubmission of the Wildomar boundary map to omit the annexed territory.

The formal process of Wildomar's quest to become a city began in fall 2004, when a petition of registered Wildomar voters and initial application was filed with LAFCO.

On another front, checks were written about two years ago to hire a Sacramento-based lobbyist with other would-be cities to urge lawmakers to pass a bill to restore the vehicle-licensing fees and return traditional funds to new cities. Mission was accomplished last August, when Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed the bill to reinstate and extend the civic startup funds.

Several thousand dollars later with expenditures on metes and boundaries maps, environmental impact studies, an initial fiscal study, a recent comprehensive fiscal analysis study completed in February and other necessary documentation provided an examination of the prospective budget and overview of services. On April 24 a unanimous county board of supervisors reviewed the Wildomar fiscal forecast and agreed to enter into a cost-sharing agreement with the prospective new city to build and staff a new fire station in the eastern portion of the community. The station was planned by the county for the past ten years to meet the expected growth in the community. The case for Wildomar cityhood was ready for the LAFCO review.

WiN chairman Bob Cashman and secretary Sheryl Ade took a break from the organization's booth at a

recent Wildomar senior health fair sponsored by Supervisor Bob Buster to give a breakdown of why the city of Wildomar is not only economically feasible but the timing is perfect to become the newest city in Riverside County in the past 15 years.

Why is it time to incorporate?

Cashman: "A good reason why we should incorporate now is because we'd like to control how the place develops out. What sort of place is Wildomar going to become? We know we like what we have now. We know what's good here. But we'd like it to be good in the future also. That doesn't happen unless you are able to control planning and zoning."

Ade: "Twenty years from now, we want it developed out to be a balanced community and local people are the best determiners of that. There is a small window of opportunity. It's so difficult to incorporate now! Right now, our studies show that we're revenue-neutral, so we don't owe any money to the county." [The revenue-neutrality state legislation of 2000 weighs the financial loss to the county when a city is created and retains its own tax dollars among other financial detriments.]

Cashman: "...Which is the perfect place to be. That's very uncommon. [Otherwise,] we'd have to pay for the right to incorporate."

What about the threat of annexations?

Cashman: "There would be piecemeal annexations. What they would do is nibble away at the edges of Wildomar, trying to take property that's valuable. And then you would see, sometime in the future, there might not be enough of Wildomar to incorporate."

Ade: "The large landowners would jump on with one of the cities..."

The commercial areas that are contiguous with the cities would go to Murrieta, Elsinore or Menifee, if they incorporate."

What will be on the ballot?

Ade: "There will be two items on the ballot and they will be separate. One will be a vote for incorporation and the other will be to choose your city council people."

Who can run for city council?

Cashman: "Anyone who meets the requirements for being a registered voter living in the community. We think the community will select wisely and we'll have a council."

What will happen if Wildomar becomes a city?

Ade: "We'll have a local group of people who live in your neighborhood and my neighborhood making these decisions with your input. Won't that be great! And a city hall – people are worried about that. We'd meet in some public building that would either be rented or leased."

Cashman: "Some of the city halls are just being built for cities that have been incorporated for 15 years." [Murrieta and Temecula are examples.]

How will incorporation affect local services?

Cashman: "The city's going to take care of services just like the county, only they've got a closer touch with the people who are involved."

Ade: "Services are provided. You just transition from one agency to another." [Local cities contract with the county to provide sheriff,

police, fire and emergency services and animal protection services.]

"The city will do the maintenance of the roads, improvements on roads. If they're regional [major arterial roads], the county will be involved with that."

#### Final words

Ade: "It is the time. The timing is now."

Cashman: "People can't believe how exactly balanced it is after all of these years. It's not like we planned to wait until it was perfect."

Ade: "But the timing – it is [perfect]. All the things that are necessary to make it a positive are...here now. That's why we're so intent on getting this vote this year."

A few days after this interview, new hurdles appeared. On May 15, Wildomar resident Gerard Ste. Marie paid in two personal checks \$25,000 of a \$35,000 fee to ask the California state controller's office to review the incorporation documents for the proposed city of Wildomar. The state controller's office has a statutory limit of 45 days to review and respond to the request. This automatically eliminates the possibility of a November 2007 election date and January 1, 2008, incorporation date, which cityhood volunteers had been eyeing.

This type of review is rare, according to a state controller representative, who estimates such requests are received once every three years.

One of the issues Ste. Marie has raised is the appropriateness of the cost-sharing agreement for a second fire station unanimously agreed upon by the county board of supervisors to be finalized by the future city of Wildomar.

A second hurdle materialized when LAFCO executive director George Spiliotis issued his report stating that the future city was not economically viable. He said the cost-sharing agreement between the county and the new city was lacking specific details of the actual costs, contributions and date of construction. The executive report also questioned whether a proposed Wal-Mart super center in Wildomar – the proposal is currently winding its way through the county's planning process – was appropriately included in the new city's commercial tax revenues. However, the report also states this analysis is not Spiliotis' final recommendation.

The WiN committee's reaction to Ste. Marie's request and the extraordinary payment of \$25,000 by an individual was swift. Ste. Marie declined to provide any details except to say he is reserving his comments until after the culmination of the state controller's review.

This is not the first time Ste. Marie has made headlines. In 2004, he represented himself and brought a successful lawsuit against the county to stop the sale of 80 acres to the Mt. San Jacinto Community College District (MSJC) for a planned satellite campus in Wildomar.

Ste. Marie's business associate and process server for the MSJC lawsuit, resident Steve Beutz, also single-handedly defeated Measure G, a community district bond that would have provided funding in part for the Wildomar campus, among another planned satellite campus in Banning and college improvements. Beutz' "Stop the Money Grab" signs were familiar sights for the June 2006 primary elections.

In September 2006, Beutz also represented himself and sued the county, questioning the legitimacy of a successful Wildomar parks initiative at the end of August 2006. The maintenance fee of \$25 a month was required to re-open the community's parks, which had

been closed since 2001. The fees would be increased to \$45 a month after the completion of a new 10-acre park on the east side of the community. Beutz' lawsuit is still pending.

"The question is: who's behind this?" asked Ade in reference to the state controller review. "This is clearly a delaying tactic. Who stands to gain from this? Somebody is benefiting from this. We all would like to know."

"We've sustained a five-year effort to get to this point," Cashman said to the LAFCO commissioners on May 24. "We wonder if it was an honest effort or just a delaying tactic. A few people should not be allowed to jeopardize the effort that has been worked on for so long. Let the people decide their future. It's the American way."

"Incorporation is still going to happen," said Ade in a phone interview. "We're confident [the state controller's review] will come back without problems."

On May 24, the LAFCO commissioners voted to hold a special meeting on July 12 to discuss the economic feasibility of Wildomar. A chartered bus with about 100 paid reservations for the trip to the May 24 LAFCO meeting was cancelled, as the commission said it would not be taking any testimony or discussion on cityhood.

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