

Thursday, June 22, 2006  
Dana Point News

## GUEST COLUMN – HE SAID

# New offices make sense



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CAPISTRANO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

The concrete has been poured, the walls tilted up and secured. The roof is tiled, the windows placed, and the lighting turned on. Now it's time for nearly 250 Capistrano Unified educational support employees to move from a collection of warehouses to an office building far better suited for meeting the educational needs of more than 50,000 students.

I've discussed over the months why the new district office makes business and financial sense. But in the final analysis, it makes people sense, because education is about people, whether in the classroom directly or associated with support services. For example: Patti Bergeron and her colleagues in accounts payable no longer will find themselves sitting practically one atop another with cluttered desks and insufficient filing space designed three decades ago when the district had fewer than 15,000 students.

Pre-school director Lupe Martinez will no longer have to hustle up and down a quarter-mile stretch of industrial road without sidewalks to touch base with nurses and other administrators scattered among several annexes.

Technology officer Scott Sexsmith will finally have all of his employees under one roof, allowing far greater productivity as they gear up to triple the electronic communication options available for instructional technology at our schools.

Kim Bailey, who directs our teaching training, will now possess state-of-the-art seminar facilities that allow sophisticated demonstrations and curriculum modeling for instructors to take back to their classrooms.

Warehouse manager Dave Clayton will no longer need to rent storage space at certain times of the year when bulk shipments of books and other supplies arrive and tax the present facility beyond capacity.

Food service directors Christina Sangster and Dawn Davey can say good-bye to rented refrigerated trucks needed up until now to augment limited refrigeration storage space in a cramped central kitchen under stress for years.

They and the district's other support staff now have an educational center configured so that they can assist students, teachers, parents and the CUSD community more efficiently. Our mission is to provide excellent teaching and learning in the classroom. We carry out that mission superbly with highly-trained teachers and classroom support employees at our 56 campuses; just this school year, five of our elementary schools earned 2006 California Distinguished School honors, bringing to 42 the number earned over the years.

While we strive to keep our non-classrooms expenditures as low as possible, a growing public school district requires an adequate facility for well-trained support employees to provide

instructional, fiscal, technological and maintenance help to our campuses. It also requires a central location for parents and other visitors to obtain help without having to traipse from building to building in order to obtain forms and other assistance. The new building is fully compliant with laws relating to ease of movement for disabled individuals. And everyone will welcome the plentiful parking.

I am happy to say goodbye to our leases for five separate buildings scattered throughout our 195-square-mile district, especially as CUSD will now recapture \$550,000 annually in lease payments for use to cover instructional-related programs such as third-grade class-size reduction. The new offices are owned by the district; the \$35 million cost is paid with funds restricted to brick-and-mortar projects within the city of San Juan Capistrano.

The Orange County Federal Teachers' Credit Union will open an office in the new education center to allow the many teachers and other credit union members in south Orange County to carry out their financial needs without having to drive long distances. The credit union's rent will add an additional \$100,000 annually to the district's general fund.

The CUSD Board of Trustees has taken a certain amount of heat for its decision, six years ago, to proceed with a comprehensive solution for housing student support services needed for a growing district. That decision was foresighted then, and even more so today. It will pay big dividends beginning this month for increasing employee productivity. And it will pay dividends for years to come. Capistrano Unified will continue to grow in the coming years; some 14,000 homes are planned during the next two decades with construction of communities on Rancho Mission Viejo properties. The new office will be more than adequate to serve the needs of educating 60,000 or more students expected by 2025.