

Borgeas: Fresno County on road to recovery

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Fresno County Supervisor Andreas Borgeas A record budget and restored core services were just a few telltale signs of recovery Fresno County Supervisor Andreas Borgeas mentioned during the State of the County Breakfast this morning.

The event, put on by the Greater Fresno Area Chamber of Commerce, packed in hundreds at Valdez Hall at the Fresno Convention and Entertainment Center to hear the county's accomplishments in the last year and its plans for the future.

Borgeas, current chairman of the Fresno County Board of Supervisors, exuded optimism in his keynote address, particularly in fiscal issues that have presented the greatest challenges for the county in the six years since the recession.

"Our county budget for the first time in the history of Fresno County has exceeded \$2 billion dollars," Borgeas said. "This elevates us to the 10th largest county in the state of California."

Borgeas said the increase in revenues allows the county to fill 77 new jobs, restore core services and contribute funds to its emergency reserves.

Among them, the Sheriff's Department has added 10 new deputy sheriffs and the Public Defender's office has benefitted from 17 new positions.

As a result of its budgetary discipline, Borgeas said Fresno County has achieved a rating of SP1+ from Standard &

Poor's credit rating service, the highest short-term rating available.

As far as attracting businesses to the county, he applauded the Board of Supervisors' decision to extend for another year a program deferring infrastructure development impact fees for project owners.

Another new program allows certain businesses to put only a portion of their filing fees down with the rest payable over the next three years.

As part of that program, Borgeas said the Board of Supervisors approved two new positions in the Public Works Department's rapid response team working in cooperation with the Economic Development Corporation serving Fresno County to help navigate the development approval process and expedite job creation.

"Fresno County is indeed open for business and we are on our way to becoming more competitive," Borgeas said.

Water, another area of concern for one of the state's top agricultural counties, is facing challenges from new state regulations regarding groundwater management.

But working with water districts and industry partners, Borgeas said Fresno County is striving to maintain its regional groundwater authority and policies while advocating for the \$7.12 billion water bond in November that will provide more water storage and infrastructure improvements for local farmers and residents.

Borgeas said the county has also made strides in the last few years to reform its financially unstable public employee pension system through new retirement tiers and the Public Employees Pension Retirement Act.

"Combined, these two mitigations will achieve a \$3.5 million savings this year and by 2020 we can expect an annual savings of \$117.5 million, so this is good news," Borgeas said. "We're working to restore the morale of Fresno County but we need help from each and every bargaining unit. Expectations must be reasonable and there can be no automatic restoration tomorrow of what has been lost over a period of years."

In another item of good news this year, Borgeas praised the California Department of Corrections for awarding \$79 million for a new jail annex housing 300 inmate beds in downtown Fresno.

Borgeas also announced that Berj Apkarian will head up the the nation's first U.S. Honorary Consul of the Republic of Armenia headquartered in Fresno County. Apkarian, executive director of physician relations at Community Medical Centers in Fresno, will be tasked with promoting the interests of the thousands of Armenian-American citizens living in the region.

Another honor was bestowed as local developers the Assemi family accepted the Key to the County on behalf of Waterford Foundation for its philanthropic efforts over the last decade.