



## **Small and Mighty Amador County (CA) Association Wins Campaign to Ensure Safe and Adequate Water Supply for Residents – September 2013**

High in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, about an hour southeast of Sacramento, Amador County, California, was facing serious water-system issues. Mainly, a very avid, highly organized and vocal anti-growth group that was thwarting the Amador County Water Agency every which way it could.

The 175-member Amador County Association of REALTORS® (ACAR,) understanding that a safe, reliable source of water was not only vital to current and future homeowners in the county, but essential to its ability to market existing properties and future reasonable and sustainable development, fought back with all its might. Turns out, that included the power and resources of the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®.

ACAR's first challenge was to secure citizens' approval of the planned Gravity Supply Line, a water delivery system of elegant simplicity that would function without electricity or mechanical parts, replacing an expensive and unreliable pumping system that was living on borrowed time. Before the REALTORS® stepped up, the only voice that residents of the county were hearing was that of the organized opposition. But Joel Lesch, ACAR's past president, was paying attention, and started going to meetings and making himself heard. And his fellow county residents started listening.

Lesch wrote persuasive editorials in the local paper, and mobilized members to write letters to the editor. "We showed up at local forums and Water Agency meetings – which were boring as hell, believe me, but needed the representation of citizens who understood the overwhelming benefits of the Gravity Supply Line. We met with all the different entities that would be affected by Gravity Supply Line, and provided a local voice of reason." ACAR helped establish the Amador County Business Council, the coalition that countered the anti-growth group, and finally won. "The Gravity Supply Line is now under construction, and will be complete in about two years," reports Lesch. "With these wildfires raging all too close to us these days, it's some comfort to know that in the future, fire tankers will be able to tap right into the new supply line for all the water they need, which is certainly not the case now." The savings to water consumers in power costs alone, will amount to about \$30 million over the next 45 years.

Next in the county's water woes, the Water Agency (having already tightened its belt to the greatest extent possible,) was attempting to streamline and update its Byzantine rate structure in order to stabilize its future. A simplified realignment of rates designed over the course of a year's study by an independent engineering and finance consultant was proposed for a special election: the new rates would more accurately reflect the costs of water delivery, and ensured that all customers in the water system pay the same amount for service and system maintenance. The proposed rate restructuring was strongly opposed by the same arch-conservative anti-growth contingent that had objected to the Gravity Supply Line.

With an Issues Mobilization Grant of \$10,000 from NAR, the small but highly effective local REALTORS® association got its message to the people of Amador County through a direct mail postcard and internet advertising coordinated by NAR's campaign team consultants. The rate re-structuring was approved by a large margin, and the new water



rates went into effect on July 1<sup>st</sup>. “It was a huge win,” explains Lesch. “The success of this campaign to secure the rate adjustment secures the whole infrastructure of Amador County’s water system, which was otherwise on shaky and unpredictable footing.” In coming forward to champion the Water Agency, the REALTORS® of Amador County have made a statement that is bigger than just water: they have positioned themselves as pro-active political players, and leaders in their community.

*To learn how REALTORS® in Amador County were involved in providing financial stability to its Water Agency, contact Sean Bellach, the California Association of REALTORS®’ Northern California Political Affairs Field Representative, at [seanb@car.org](mailto:seanb@car.org) or 707.217.1441.*

