

County DIGEST



OCTOBER 1997

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS THE BEST BARGAIN IN THE BASEMENT

Have you been a victim of an unfair business practice or a real estate fraud? Are you thinking of suing someone or afraid of being sued in Small Claims Court? Do you have a dispute that you would like to settle without going to court? Do you live in an unincorporated area of the County and have a problem with your Cable Television service? Are you thinking of retiring and still becoming an active member of society by participating in an award winning volunteer program? Are you a Web surfer?

These and other consumer related questions can be answered by the County's Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) located in the basement of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration.

The department, created in July 1975, assists more than 400,000 consumers annually and may be able to assist you, too. As a matter of fact, the consumer protection services are **FREE**.

DCA Web Site

The department's efforts to keep pace with the informational wave will be realized by the end of October 1997 with the launching of its Web site during National Consumer Week. The site will inform consumers on everything from handling credit card disputes, purchasing a new or used car and signing a contract to warnings and information on real estate and other consumer rip-off scams. Check out DCA's Web site at <http://www.co.la.ca.us/consumer-affairs>

Consumer Services

The consumer services division counsels, investigates and mediates consumer complaints resulting from unfair and deceptive transactions in the marketplace. It also conducts special investigations and makes referrals to law enforcement or regulatory agencies, when appropriate.

Consumers can call the department's 24-hour consumer information line and listen to more than 60 recorded

messages that answer questions concerning credit, retail sales, landlord-tenant, automobiles, etc. Trained counselors are available during normal business hours.

Real Estate Fraud & Information Program

The newest consumer protection program of the department was organized to protect property owners against real estate fraud. DCA's trained staff is available to provide information and counseling on foreclosures, refinancing, building contractors, home purchases and repairs and undeveloped land sales. Furthermore, the staff will accept complaints of real estate fraud, prepare cases for civil and criminal prosecuting agencies and mediate disputes when necessary.

Small Claims Court Advisor Program

The program counsels litigants and prospective litigants with questions regarding the small claims court process: filing, service, collection, preparing the claim, appeal, etc. Recorded informational messages are also available to answer questions about most small claims procedures 24-hours a day. Trained counselors are also available during normal business hours.

Dispute Mediation Program

The program offers a service to those who wish to settle their dispute without going to court by using a trained mediator. A mediator will work with both parties to reach an agreeable solution the concerned parties can live with. The program also handles disputes between two businesses, two neighbors, etc. Mediation is a lot less expensive than going to court and avoids having to take a whole day off from work.

Cable Television Franchising

The department not only administers 41 cable television franchises in the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County, but also investigates and

mediates subscriber complaints in the areas of billing, reception problems, programming, poor customer service, etc.

Volunteer & College Internship Program

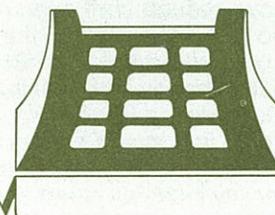
With more than 80 volunteers and college interns, the program provides interested community members an opportunity to support the department's consumer protection activities in the areas of telephone counseling, mediation services and special research projects. College students gain basic marketplace knowledge such as purchasing a used car, renting an apartment, using credit wisely while earning college credits. It is an award winning program.

The Department of Consumer Affairs with all these services and programs is indeed the best bargain in the basement.



Important Numbers To Keep

- Consumer Services
(213) 974-1452
- Real Estate Fraud & Information Program
(800) 973-3370
- Small Claims Court Advisor Program
(213) 974-9759
- Dispute Mediation Program
(213) 974-0825
- Cable Television Franchising
(213) 974-2323
- Volunteer & College Internship Program
(213) 974-9740



LINDA MALDONADO: GIVING PATIENTS A CLEAN AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT

"I am going to faint."

Those were the words of Linda Maldonado as she heard her name being called by Board Chairman Zev Yaroslavsky. With her father and the acting chief executive officer of the El Monte Comprehensive Health Center (CHC) behind her, Maldonado received a scroll of commendation as the **September 1997 County Employee of the Month**. Coincidentally, the day she was honored by the County Board of Supervisors and the County family was also the day she was born.

Maldonado, an Administrative Assistant II with the Personal Health Services Unit of the El Monte Comprehensive Health Center, has worked for the County for 20 years. As the designated manager of the El Monte facility, she is responsible for space management, alterations and improvements, communication services, fixed asset management, contract monitoring and development, hazardous materials management as well as a wide range of special projects and assignments for the San Gabriel Valley County Health Centers.

Her career with the County began as a student worker with the Department of Health Services (DHS). As a student worker at the Central Health Center, Maldonado watched the current DHS headquarters on North Figueroa being built. She was then transferred to the Roybal Comprehensive Health Center where she was actively involved with the initial plans and preparations to open the El Monte facility in 1983. In January of that same year, she was the first employee hired and continues to be an asset.

Through her knowledge, experience and background in materials management, she was able to procure more than \$10 million of office and medical equipment in less than ten months to equip the newly opened facility. Furthermore, she was appointed Facility Appearance Coordinator for DHS because of her experience with facilities and understanding of facility safety and standards. Her new title allowed her to advise staff on how to improve patient flow, reduce staff overcrowding, etc. at no additional cost to the County. As a consequence, the El Monte CHC achieved the highest standard for "Most Outstanding Facility Appearance" three years in a row. She has maintained the building for 14 years and to this day the facility looks as clean and organized as the day it first opened.

Maldonado believes in a well-equipped facility and one that fully adapts to correct standards and regulations. As an employee with the El Monte CHC, she ensures that all facility licenses and permits are current and coordinates with state and local agencies to make certain that each facility she oversees including the Roybal and Hudson CHCs comply with all standards and regulations. Her efforts and leadership are credited as significant contributors to the El Monte CHC receiving a three-year Joint Commission Licensing and Accreditation with commendation from 1993 to 1996. More recently, the facility received another commendation for an additional one year.

Because of her firm belief in giving patients and members of the public seeking health services the best possible care, Maldonado played an integral role in designing and implementing the STARTEL Automated Telephone Answering System at the El Monte, the Roybal and the Hudson facilities. As a result, the community now has access to an efficient and user-friendly telephone system to obtain clinic information and make appointments seven days a week, 24-hours a day.

Her motto, "A clean, safe environment is what all patients should have, regardless of socioeconomic background or life circumstances," is the cornerstone of her work. Not only does she take great pride in her work and her efforts on behalf of the needs of the facilities' patients, but also on the needs of her immediate community — her church.

Maldonado is an active member of St. John the Baptist Catholic Church and currently holds the presidency of the parish school's Parent's School Board. Her zeal for fundraising has helped raise \$24,000 for the school's needs and an additional \$35,000 toward the construction of a new kindergarten classroom. Through her involvement with the church and school, many have sought physical refuge from the El Monte CHC.

Employment with the County runs in her family. Her father was an employee with the Probation Department and her sister is currently employed by the Department of Public Social Services. But it was her dedication to helping better the lives of the sick and infirmed that earned her a commendation from the Board of Supervisors.

Congratulations!



THE HONOREE BEAMS AFTER RECEIVING HER SCROLL FROM BOARD CHAIRMAN YAROSLAVSKY.

Coming Soon To A Venue Near You!

Supervisor Gloria Molina

and

State Senator Hilda L. Solis

present the

Centro Maravilla

8th Annual Community Job Fair

Saturday, November 8

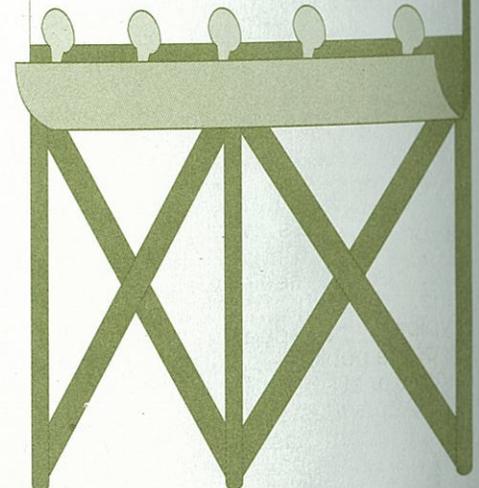
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Centro Maravilla Community Service Center

4716 East Cesar Chavez Avenue
(between Arizona Avenue & Dangler Street)

Call (213) 260-2805 for additional information.

Equal Opportunity Employer



THE DEPARTMENT OF CORONER

LAW & SCIENCE SERVING THE COMMUNITY

More often than not, the public's perception of the Department of Coroner is derived from what they see on television or read in the newspaper. In almost every other news broadcast where an alleged murder has occurred, the Coroner is shown removing the body and putting it in the van to be transported to the department's central facility. This, however, merely scratches the surface of what the Department of Coroner is all about.

The creation of the Coroner dates back to medieval times when the justiciar of England appointed a knight in each shire or county to confiscate property of hanged felons and sell the items of value for the royal coffers. A knight was given the title of crowner which evolved into coroner meaning crown from the Latin word *corona*. Eventually, the responsibility and influence of the coroner included keeping a record of all criminal activities in the county, ensuring that the local sheriff collected royal taxes honestly and, most importantly, determining the cause of all violent and sudden deaths. Though crude by today's standards, these early examinations and investigations spurred the evolution of forensic medicine.

Today, the Department of Coroner is governed by state law with its basic function of determining cause and manner of death unchanged as the foundation of its main mission. The job of a coroner is scientifically complex and difficult yet fascinating.

Of the approximately 60,000 deaths in Los Angeles County, the Coroner is responsible for one-third (approximately 20,000 cases). Of those 20,000 cases, one-half are actually brought into the central facility for examination by the forensic pathologists. But before this can happen, a determination has to be made whether or not a death indeed falls under the jurisdiction of the Coroner. State law dictates that if one has not seen a doctor within 20 days of death or one dies of a sudden or violent death such as a homicide, suicide or accident, one's death becomes the Coroner's case. Thousands of calls each year are received by the department from various agencies, hospitals, mortuaries and law enforcement who report deaths which may or may not meet the department's criteria.

Typically, many deaths happen in the view of the public — a home, a place of business or at a hospital. The Coroner's investigators must respond to all scenes where a death has occurred with the exception of hospitals. Their function is to gather information and evidence to be

utilized by the forensic pathologists in determining the cause and manner of death in each case. They are also responsible for identifying the deceased as well as notifying the immediate family of the death. Coroner investigators are peace officers under the California State Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST).

An autopsy is the primary medical procedure utilized in determining the cause of death. The procedure falls under the department's Forensic Medicine Division. Forensic technicians provide photographs, x-ray support and other specialized duties under the arm of operations.

The public's perception that an autopsy can be elected or chosen by a family member is incorrect. State law dictates that the Coroner is solely responsible in determining the extent of each and every examination.

Approximately 6,500 cases are autopsied each year and the remainder are administered lesser examination procedures. As a consequence, the department has an overwhelming impact on the criminal justice system.

The Forensic Laboratories provide critical blood and tissue analyses which help the forensic pathologists determine the cause of death. The laboratories are also required to maintain and preserve evidence. The courts, therefore, rely heavily on the investigative findings, scientific testimony and physical evidence in the adjudication of each murder case. There are over 2,000 homicides in Los Angeles County each year, approximately half of which occur in the city of Los Angeles. In addition, noncriminal legalities such as insurance settlements, estates and body disposition are equally affected by the investigative findings.

In the last six years, the Department of Coroner has not fared well in the overall budget battle having gone from a \$15 million budget in 1991-92 to \$11.5 million presently. As a consequence, the department had to look for different

and innovative ways of doing business without compromising its mandate.

The objective is raise revenue and engage in public/private partnerships. Yes, even the Coroner has figured out how to make money and has taken this mission on with a fervor.

The department's administrative staff is working hard with each division to develop and initiate programs. Some of these are cost recovery for state mandated programs, i.e., infant death

protocols, nursing home deaths, law enforcement billings, transportation and storage billings, tissue for the living program and document sales. They have aggressively utilized the resources of the Productivity Investment Fund (PIF) to implement the expansion of the department's tracking computer system, create a "Robotox" drug extraction system to automatically extract and identify drugs from specimen samples and expand the Gunshot Residue program (GSR) which is utilized by



A RADIOGRAPH OF A SKULL USED TO IDENTIFY FOREIGN PROJECTILES IN CORONER CASES.

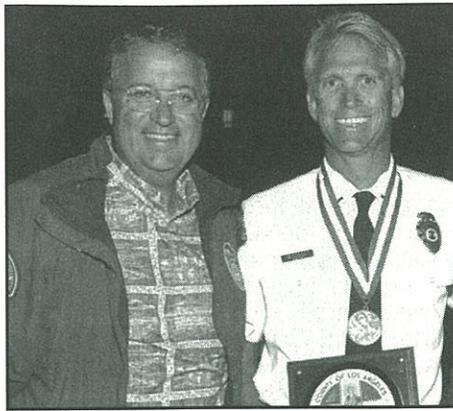
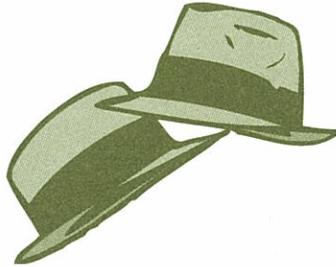
various law enforcement agencies throughout the state. GSR determines the presence of gunshot residue on defendants.

Moreover, the department is engaging in its own marketing effort which includes the selling of Coroner memorabilia such as T-shirts, toe tags, towels, etc., to offset the costs associated with the Youthful Drunk Driving Visitation Program (YDDVP). The program has been quite successful and the department has plans for its further expansion. YDDVP is utilized by the courts as an alternative sentencing program for youthful drunk driver offenders but recently expanded to include referrals from other type of violators.

Southern California and in particular Los Angeles County has made its mark in the disaster arena with fires, floods, riots, earthquakes and plane disasters. The Coroner is one of the nine lead County agencies responding to these

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HATS OFF



SENIOR OCEAN LIFEGUARD KEVIN MARBLE, A LOS ANGELES COUNTY FIRE DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEE, WITH SUPERVISOR DON KNABE AFTER RECEIVING THE 1997 LIFEGUARD MEDAL OF VALOR

CORONER

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

types of emergencies which occur under the management and direction of the County's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) headed up by the Sheriff and the Chief Administrative Officer. Constant training and preparation are necessary in order to ensure appropriate response to a mass fatality emergency. The EOC is responsible for the coordination of Coroner mutual aid in the Southern California region.

Recently, the Coroner's expertise was requested in both the KAL 801 air crash in Guam and the "Heaven's Gate" mass suicide in San Diego County. The department is now part of the Region IX Federal D-MORT Team in-charge of responding to mass fatality emergencies that require federal assistance.

The Department of Coroner has taken great strides toward making the public and the various agencies it deals with aware of its responsibilities and how these functions interface with each organization. Equally important is the department's objective to meet the needs of the community in the most dignified and respectful manner. The department looks forward to the future in being able to continue to expand and move in this direction.

OCTOBER RETIREES

Congratulations to the following employees who are joining the ranks of the retired after 30 or more years of service to the people of Los Angeles County:

- DISTRICT ATTORNEY:** Gerlene M. Bangs
- FIRE:** Thomas H. Kenney, Michael D. Lewis, Dominick Sergi, Dennis H. Adkins
- HEALTH SERVICES:** Dorothy V. Erstad, Mary Jones, Suzy S. Katsuda, Valerie F. Krupsky, Barbara J. Simmons, Frank Stevenson, Jr.
- INTERNAL SERVICES:** Susan H. Curran
- PROBATION:** Will R. Harrell
- PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES:** Anthony A. Hart
- PUBLIC WORKS:** Francis H. Chun, Samir K. Faltas, Gary Maschmeyer
- SHERIFF:** Anthony P. Torres, Robert F. Devot
- SUPERIOR COURTS:** Dixie L. Wyborney

Congratulations to the following employees who are retiring after serving the people of the County of Los Angeles for more than 25 years:

- AUDITOR-CONTROLLER:** Ethel L. Martin, William J. Starks
- CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE:** Terrance W. Snook
- CHILDREN'S SERVICES:** Margaret Singer, Lola Ann Snyder
- FIRE:** Larry L. Carroll
- HEALTH SERVICES:** Norma K. Calaunan, Alma R. Cleland, Laruth Hildreth, Genaro Navarette, Ernestine Pruiet, Susie Prymus, Joena Tipton
- INTERNAL SERVICES:** Wilmer Huggins, Joe L. Wiley, Fred J. Devoogd
- MUSEUMS:** Robert L. Bezy
- PUBLIC DEFENDER:** Joan W. Garrott
- PUBLIC SOCIAL SERVICES:** Danute Moors
- PUBLIC WORKS:** Dianne C. Wilkerson
- SHERIFF:** James R. Ellison, Nancy K. Jefferys, Larry A. Luter, Steven K. Williams, Michael J. Santander



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John S. Mina
Staff

SEND US...
YOUR COMMENTS, STORY IDEAS OR QUESTIONS!

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MAIL: COUNTY DIGEST

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