

Remarks at City Council Meeting 4/6/09
Laura Olhasso, Mayor

Last week's terrible tragedy tested our city. It is very difficult to be sorrowful when you are rigid with anger. And it is very hard to be outraged when your heart is breaking. But, somehow we, collectively, were able to convey these conflicting emotions. I am so proud to say that our entire community met the challenge with compassion and resolve.

First, we must again extend our deepest sympathy to the family of Angel and Angelina Posca. Their tragic deaths will always be remembered by all of us. I have written a condolence letter to the Posca family on behalf of the City Council and our residents. I have also begun talks about how we might honor their memories - perhaps with a marker or a tree at Memorial Park.

Second, I would like to give an update on those who were injured. Six people were treated and released that night. Six people were transported to the hospital. All have been released and are doing well, despite the trauma of their experience. Fortunately, none of those hurt in the accident suffered life-threatening injuries.

Third, I have met with Peter and Lenora Wannier who own the Flintridge Book Store, and spoken to Leonard Totta who owns the property and leases it to the Wanniers, and Pauline, owner of Melody Nails. I have given them our assurance that the City will do all it can to help them reopen their businesses as soon as humanly possible.

Fourth, there are many thank yous that must be made. It's a long list each of these people deserve our recognition and warmest gratitude. To the L. A. County Sheriff's Department and the L.A. County Fire Department thank you for your quick and professional response. They worked the entire night and into the morning to provide medical assistance and aid to the injured and to protect the safety of others in the general area. In addition, they worked throughout the night to clear the intersection in preparation for the morning's commute. They worked to save the book store and remove the truck without further damage to the building or the businesses. I know they will say they were just doing their jobs, but they have proven once again that the protection of our public safety is in committed hands. Thank you to the men and women under the wonderful leadership of Captain Dave Silversparre and Battalion Chief Luke Claus.

To our City staff thank you. Many came back to work that evening and stayed through the long night: Kevin Chun and Ann Wilson for being available to help coordinate the City's dissemination of information to the waiting media; Edward Hitti, Ben Bartlett and Kent Barr who spent all night at the accident site, helping in the inspection of the building and City infrastructure and assisting the fire department's clearing of the site and securing the book store; Carl Alameda who helped organize the candlelight vigil; Sue McNerny and Susan Bertness who fielded so very many media calls; Mark Alexander, city manager, who coordinated the staff's response and juggled this tragedy and the everyday needs of City Hall with his usual grace and calm; Mark Steres, city attorney, who showed once again he is more than our attorney, he is the City's loyal friend and advisor. Thank you for your professionalism and your dedication to our town.

To my fellow Councilmembers: Mayor Pro Tem Don Voss who cut short his vacation and returned home to help and lend support to the City's response efforts; Greg Brown who stayed at the accident site until 3 a.m. to fielding questions and comments from our residents and ensuring that all was being done; Steve Del Guercio for his wise assistance and advice as we worked to find solutions to this issues so that no one ever has to go through this again; Dave Spence for also meeting with our residents and the media and for encouraging Supervisor Antonovich to join us in our efforts to bring about a solution to this hazard. Thank you. As always, you serve this community with an unmatched sense of responsibility.

To Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Pat Anderson for immediately reaching out to the businesses which had been shut down and providing them assurance that the City will work with them to get them back into operation as quickly as possible; *Valley Sun* editor Carol Cormaci for her early and righteous comments about the problematic history of the intersection and Caltrans' indifference to it; St. George's Episcopal Church pastor Rev. Amy Pringle for reaching out on Thursday morning with the idea of a candlelight vigil and for her touching prayers that evening; the 200 people who attended that vigil -- a community mourning the two tragic deaths in our town. Thank you for going above and beyond the call.

To the artist who was so angry she called to say she would be happy to build and paint the 'no trucks' signs herself; to Janna Gosselin who has volunteered organize a letter writing campaign to Caltrans.

To our elected officials, Assemblymember Anthony Portantino, Senator Carol Liu, Supervisor Mike Antonovich and Congressman David Dreier who have responded by matching our outrage and who have concrete solutions which we believe will go far toward minimizing the continued risk of another accident such as this one.

Thank you to all of you. I am so very proud of you all.

As you have probably read, our demands to Caltrans FINALLY elicited a response. How very sad that it took the deaths of two unwary people to grab the attention of those in the position to effectuate immediate change. The good news is that, I believe, we have it now. And we will continue to move quickly so that we do not lose momentum.

There are four parts to our public safety campaign. The first was to force the immediate closure of Angeles Crest Highway to big rig trucks. On Thursday morning we began with another letter, both emailed and faxed *demanding* that Caltrans close the highway to big rig trucks. We gave at least a dozen interviews with television, radio and newspaper reporters repeating the same message -. "Close Angeles Crest Highway to trucks". We held a joint press conference on Thursday afternoon again repeating that demand. That press conference included Sheriff's Captain Dave Silversparre, Fire Department Battalion Chief Luke Claus, Assemblymember Anthony Portantino and Supervisor Mike Antonovich.

Our instant, focused response was successful. Caltrans announced on Friday that it will close Angeles Forest Hwy -- the only ingress point at the moment to Angeles Crest Hwy -- to 5 axle trucks for a 90 day period. That closure began on Monday. There are signs along the entire route that cannot be missed. We believe this moratorium is an important step, but only a first step.

It brings us to the second step of our campaign. We will be working with Assemblyman Anthony Portantino and Senator Carol Liu on the bill they have jointly introduced that would make that truck ban permanent. The City Council focused on the specific language of that bill in a discussion at Monday's Council meeting. It will include an extension of the truck ban to the other ingress points to Angeles Crest Hwy, especially ACH from the Wrightwood area once that road reopens. It will also better define 'trucks'

as it is our opinion that commercial trucks of much smaller size than 5 axle, passing through town, must be banned. Once the bill is finalized, we will be doing all we can to lobby the state legislature for its immediate passage. We are pleased that Supervisor Mike Antonovich has rallied the Board of Supervisors to support all our efforts and to take whatever steps the County needs to ensure no trucks enter the highway from the county road.

However, we know, even when trucks are banned, there may be some scofflaw who will ignore that ban and bring his truck over the Angeles Crest Hwy. So, the third prong of our campaign will be continued pressure on Caltrans regarding the installation of "Test Brake" signs and the siting of a truck ramp and brake testing location somewhere *above* the City. Our hope is that, should a truck illegally enter ACH and lose its brakes, it will be able to pull over and stop *before* it even gets into the city. In addition, we will be working with Caltrans to either reconstitute the existing truck arresters in the medians and/or construct additional ones. This is where we will institute that letter writing campaign so that Caltrans will not back down on its promise of further, immediate action. And, we will ask the Highway Patrol to step up its patrol of the area so that unlawful trucks are stopped and cited at the beginning of their journey.

And, finally, we know the driver of the 'onion truck' last September used his GPS system to identify the route over the crest. The driver of last week's truck had both a GPS and printed directions for his route. In either case, the proliferation of GPS systems increases the chances of out-of-area truck drivers using the ACH as the shortest point from A to B. Without proper identification of routes that are either closed to and/or dangerous for trucks we can continue to suffer from the danger of out-of-control trucks coming down the highway. This is a problem, not only affecting us here in LCF, but potentially many other communities throughout the country. For this reason, as the fourth prong of our safety campaign, we have met with Congressman David Dreier and received his pledge that his office will work with the proper regulatory agencies, the trucking associations and the GPS companies to write requirements that the GPS companies identify routes closed or dangerous to truck traffic.

We are doing all we can on the local, county, state and federal levels to ensure this tragedy will never happen again. We will be asking for your help. Together, we will make sure that the lives of Angel and Angelina

Posca were not lost in vain. Again, thank you to all of you as we work together toward a comprehensive solution.