



Giving thanks for what makes San Diego special

By **JASON HUGHES**

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Given last month's wildfires that ravaged much of our county and the many other challenges we're facing as a region and nation, it would be easy to forget that the Thanksgiving holiday later this week should be far more than a big dinner and a few football games on TV.

Frankly, it's not all that hard to focus only on the negatives we face today -- the increasing multiyear drought that is parching our state's water supplies, the icy real estate market, the listless performances of the San Diego Chargers thus far this season, gas prices crowding the \$4 area and the many other economic and social maladies that abound.

Truth be told, though, there are so many more positive factors that influence our region's quality of life for which we can and should give thanks. What better time than this Thanksgiving time of year to gather a few of them up for remembrance.

First, we can be thankful for the mutual aid network of fire departments, not only those based in cities and fire protection districts in San Diego County, but from other jurisdictions throughout the state and even Southwest. There were fire engines and firefighters from all of California and from other states as far away as New Mexico battling the countless blazes that menaced our county for nearly two weeks.

We can also take grateful pride in the top-rate countywide emergency operations system that kept the public informed about the fires and coordinated the massive firefighting efforts that saved lives and kept the devastating property losses from being considerably higher.

The longstanding and strong military establishment in our region brings social and economic benefits that are hard to exaggerate. It doesn't take a war to appreciate the presence of our Navy and Marine Corps operations afloat and ashore. I, for one am thankful there is a Camp Pendleton to serve as the buffer zone between our county and the "land of the tacky" to the north.

Our servicemen and women should be appreciated for serving on the frontlines wherever liberty is being threatened. Local families who will host these dedicated young people in their homes for Thanksgiving dinner will thank many individually.

In local politics, we should thank the fates that have allowed Jerry Sanders to be our city's mayor. To be sure, there have been a few political miscues and momentary lapses in excellence in our good mayor's performance, but his calm and steady demeanor and experience in the public sector makes him far superior to anybody who has surfaced to date claiming to worthy of consideration in next year's mayoral election.

We can be equally thankful to others who are not our mayor, most notably the city attorney who suggested the entire city of San Diego should be evacuated during the wildfires. Such an exodus would have been second only to Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt 3,500 years ago, give or take a few centuries.

Our region's educational resources also are unparalleled and worthy of civic gratitude. UCSD is arguably the finest public university in the country for its resources in academic and scientific research. Beyond its campus, the university's impact on our local high-tech economy and job base is incalculable. Likewise, San Diego State, Cal State San Marcos, the University of San Diego, Point Loma Nazarene, and Alliant International University compose an outstanding selection of higher education opportunities not found in most other regions.

No survey of our region's many blessings would be complete without mention of those civic leaders who helped create the San Diego we find today. Early visionaries such as the late Ernie Hahn and Gordon Luce along with those still with us: Pete Wilson, Kim Fletcher and Malin Burnham - to name but three - have helped San Diego transition into a global metropolis for which all of us who live and work in the region are the better. We can be thankful to them and other civic leaders as well for the vibrant urban center Downtown San Diego has become.

Others have made equally significant contributions but of a different nature. For one, Ernest Rady's generosity has made what is now Rady Children's Hospital one of the best pediatric medical centers in the world. His earlier gift to UCSD instantly created a top-tier graduate school of management on that campus.

Aside from the fact that the company he founded, Qualcomm, has made San Diego the wireless communications capital of the world, Irwin Jacobs and his family's contributions are numerous and varied. I was president of the San Diego Children's Museum board of directors a while back when Irwin and his wife, Joan, donated \$5 million to the museum, literally rescuing that important resource from having to close its doors. For that, they have my eternal gratitude. The San Diego Symphony, UCSD Jacobs School of Engineering, the High Tech High charter school system are but a few examples of his family's contributions to make our regional community a better place to live, work and learn.

Last, at least for now, we should be thankful for the very special gift of philanthropy and the common desire to help others that describes the people of the San Diego region in times of crisis.

So many more to thank. So little space.

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