

## OPINION

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# **Foundation Stands the Test of Time**

*by the Santa Clarita Valley Facilities Foundation Board of Directors*

Seven years ago our schools were in crisis with severe overcrowding. The number of students significantly exceeded the designed capacity of the school facilities. Forty-five percent of the then-17,000 William S. Hart Union High School District students were considered “unhoused,” with most occupying temporary facilities.

Funding for new schools was difficult to come by, and locating suitable sites was even tougher. Several school bond measures had gone down to defeat.

Something had to be done to break this bottleneck. The Hart district board developed a concept for a public-private partnership that could get a school project off the ground, move it along quickly, minimize costs and maximize state funding.

The school district’s concept was to form a public-benefit corporation — a private, nonprofit foundation — that could focus on a school building project and bring it to fruition.

Working with prominent community leaders, the school district board helped to establish the Santa Clarita Valley Facilities Foundation with a mission to find a way to build the much-needed Golden Valley High School and relieve severe overcrowding.

The result is that Golden Valley High School was built and opened for students last September. It will serve 2,600 students and has assisted in alleviating overcrowding in the other local high schools — Canyon, Hart and Valencia.

What many may not be aware of is that by structuring the development process through the Foundation, the school district was able to maximize state funding that made the entire project possible.

But that's not the whole of the story. Along the way the SCV Facilities Foundation, in a successful joint venture with the city of Santa Clarita, provided a means to build a key portion of the Golden Valley cross-valley connector road at a substantial savings to taxpayers.

And now, the Facilities Foundation is in the process of selling residual property adjacent to the Golden Valley site it developed, and all of those funds will be plowed back into the education of children in the Hart District. That's the only thing the funds can be used for; it's the stated mission of the Foundation.

None of this would have been possible without the Foundation as an independent vehicle for marshaling the school site development. It was a new concept in 1998, and it is one that has now proven its worth.

Perhaps because it is a relatively new concept, the Foundation and its work may not be familiar to everyone. The legal structure as a "public benefit" corporation also accurately describes the work and nature of the Foundation.

The Foundation is a nonprofit organization, and the members of the Board of Directors serve on a voluntary basis without pay or compensation for services of any kind. The Foundation has just one part-time clerical employee, whom it shares with the Hart District, and it hires outside consultants as needed, to manage specific projects.

The Foundation voluntarily follows the "open meeting" rules that apply to every elected body in this state, and it regularly attracts members of the public to its meetings. A complete listing of all meeting agendas can be found at the Foundation's website, [www.hartdistrict.org/foundation](http://www.hartdistrict.org/foundation). They are posted in advance of every meeting, and attendance by members of the public is welcomed.

The Foundation's finances are also a matter of public record and are subject to an annual independent and certified audit. These financial statements are available from the Foundation office.

In addition to five community leaders who were appointed to the board when it was founded by the school district, two additional seats have been created as a means of expanding independent oversight. One seat is reserved for the Hart District board president, and a second seat is held for the school superintendent.

Perhaps most importantly, in these times of tight government budgets, the Foundation is now self-sustaining. All expenses are paid out of its own funds, which are generated from its development activities.

The Golden Valley projects involved a complex set of transactions. These projects required that the Foundation meet all of the relevant rules, regulations and standards from myriad government agencies — local, state and federal. The projects were formulated through many public meetings of the Hart District school board, the Santa Clarita City Council and those of the Foundation's own board.

Through the Foundation, the Golden Valley school and road projects were structured in a way that saved millions of dollars in costs and ensured that the school district would receive the absolute maximum in construction funds from the state and federal governments. The projects produced a surplus that will now be invested in our schools and the education of our children.

The school board, working with the Foundation, is now able to consider the construction of new performing arts centers at Canyon and Saugus high schools.

As our community grows and develops, our needs and challenges with student enrollment also expand. The solutions will have to be as resolute as the problems we face. The SCV Facilities Foundation is one of those solutions that has now stood the test of time.

*This column was submitted by the directors of the SCV Facilities Foundation: Richard A. Patterson, Gary E. Condie, Teresa Todd, John Hassel, Robert C. Lee, Dennis V. King and Rory Livingston. It represents their own opinions, and not necessarily those of The Signal.*