

# Ladera seeks solutions to faltering economy

Civic Council members say sense of community will help.

By **RASHI KESARWANI**

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Ladera Ranch residents have rallied together during difficult challenges before.

Faced with the possibility of a peaker power plant, residents organized a community group to oppose the utility's proposal for the plant.

When Chris and Lori Coble lost their three young children in a car accident, the community held fundraisers and wrapped more than 100,000 commemorative ribbons around trees and lights in south Orange County.

As school budget cuts loomed, Ladera parents planned fundraisers to save teachers from layoffs.

Now, the community faces the challenges of a shrinking economy plagued by declining home values, deeper school budget cuts on the horizon, possible retail store closures and increased job insecurity. Just as before, residents are taking measures — often in small ways — to help each other through the economic difficulty.

Bill Lawson, president of the Ladera Ranch Civic Council, and Elizabeth Hall, vice president of the council, along with Treasurer Michelle Patterson and Director Bill O'Hair agree that economic hardship will remain the number one challenge facing Ladera residents in 2009.

Civic council members Lawson, Hall and Patterson all say that Ladera's strong sense of community will help it through the recession.

Patterson, co-owner of an outsourcing company, works closely with Ladera Ranch business owners in need of support for their accounting, finance and human resources needs.

"The biggest trend that we see, companies are cutting corners. They're downsizing and they're looking at ways...to do less with more. That's a trend across the board," said Patterson, who co-owns the company Touchpointe with business partner Peter Schouweiler.

Patterson's Touchpointe works with a range of companies that are either distressed, have received recent cash injections, are going through growth changes or are seeking to cut costs in their back office in order to grow.

Patterson said she's noticed that every sector of the economy has been affected by the downturn.

"You don't have anybody that's growing as much as you've got survival mode," she said.

Patterson said one way she seeks to support her friends in Ladera is by patronizing their businesses. For instance, Patterson said she personally makes a point of conducting all of her client visits at restaurants in Ladera Ranch.

Some of the business owners in the Mercantile West Shopping Center have banded together to promote each other's businesses.

"You take care of your own," Patterson said.

Patterson says her neighbors in Ladera return the favor by making Touchpointe their first call when they're in need of office support.

Patterson says this kind of give and take will help get the community through the difficult economic times.

Besides the economy, Hall said she sees transportation issues, school budgetary cuts, and Mello Roos taxes as some of the important issues facing the community and capturing the civic council's attention in 2009.