

[Madera supervisor discusses struggles and hope](#)

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Madera County Supervisor Tom Wheeler acknowledged hard times and cost-cutting measures during the State of the County Luncheon today.

The luncheon, put on by the Madera County Economic Development Corporation, drew hundreds to the Madera Municipal Golf Course to hear about the year's issues from representatives such as Madera Mayor Pro Tem Robert Poythress and Chowchilla Mayor Jim Kopshever.

Since his election to the board of supervisors in 2006, Chairman Wheeler said 2009 was the worst economic year he's seen. The current budget of \$171 million represents \$30 million less than when he started while layoffs and furloughs have led to 300 fewer employees.

He noted other factors scathing the budget such as property taxes down \$3.1 million and sales taxes, which were down \$4.9 million.

"We're doing a lot of things we're exploring new ideas cost saving alternatives and doing a lot of different with the smaller budget that we have," Wheeler said.

Wheeler pointed out difficult but necessary reductions such as cuts to the the county library system, the fire department and animal services. The county also readjusted how it offers its services by having citizens pay more in fees for programs used on an individual basis.

"We've tried to balance it," Wheeler said. "We told all the departments, we want to make this equal to everybody . . . It's a chance to downsize, it's a chance to cut the fat and it's a chance to make small government run more efficiently."

Despite lower revenues and more cuts planned ahead, Wheeler said there are things to look ahead such as a new fire station planned for North Fork and a new veterans hospital in Oakhurst to break ground in April.

Wheeler also said roads and transportation in the county has improved in the last year thanks to money from Measure A and help from CalTrans. He said he was also working more closely with the cities in the past to partner on projects that could benefit all county residents.

"There's a lot of things we can do and I'm pushing to see what kind of services and things we can do to make us work together and have a better Madera," Wheeler said.

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