



Soapbox: Yucca Valley without the Hi-Desert Nature Museum

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Published: Saturday, July 9, 2011 2:29 AM CDT
On behalf of the Hi-Desert Nature Museum Guild Steering Committee

A lot of people call Yucca Valley home. It's where their sanctuary and privacy is, where their sense of self gets most traction. All places called "home" are like that. They're places where people best know the lay of the land, places where they feel most like they belong.

It's understandable, then, when people would hope that the greater community their home is in nurtures their sense of belonging. Communities do this with their civic spirit, with their bearing and character, and these virtues are, in turn, achieved through a community's wise stewardship of its own special place in the world, and through its countenance of residents past and present who have chosen to belong there.

Communities that invite belonging have a heritage, and they take pains to make that heritage accessible to any and all who want to see it, learn from it and be inspired by it. Yucca Valley has such an accessible heritage; it is the Hi-Desert Nature Museum.

This is where people who live here go to find out a bit about where they are and where they've come from. It's a place where friends, neighbors, acquaintances and strangers alike can learn why the community so many people call home is more than just development opportunities and franchise retail, more than its traffic signals and police cruisers on Highway 62, more than its obvious concessions to the pernicious demands of a rogue economy.

With exception of the library's more selective-use quarters, the Hi-Desert Nature Museum is Yucca Valley's only sheltered, public space. People can meet and walk and talk together there. They can socialize or they can remain quiet and solitary. They can be entertained and educated there and, should they so choose, they can learn what triumphs and failures, what pains and pleasures, dreams and realities gave Yucca Valley its place and population, and its memory.

The museum is Yucca Valley's common ground, no purchase required, no membership

fee extracted, no registration, license or special privilege necessary. It is 5300 square feet of this community's history, hope, creativity, pride and permanence, and it's open to any and all who, now and then, want to be reminded that they belong somewhere special.

Lose the museum and the residents of Yucca Valley will lose their shared footing. Gone will be programs, lectures and special events. Gone will be the galleries that bring people together in the exhibit of art, history, nature and narrative. But gone, especially, will be a place where people can feel they belong, where they feel they have a stake in the community they have chosen to call home.

When the annual high school art exhibit is hung from the light poles on Highway 62, and the local-science and local-history lectures are shouted from street corners; when commercial space is the only place left for residents to go when they want to go out, then the people of Yucca Valley will know they lost more than just a Town facility when the museum's doors were closed. They will know what a truly "essential service" they have lost.