

Progress Report

Weed & Seed shows results in Paradise South

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As the name suggests, the Weed & Seed effort in southwest Modesto has qualities of a back-yard gardening project — removing unwanted things and planting good things.

The neighborhood known as Paradise South has suffered from high crime and low education. It's a mix of city and county jurisdictions, which contributes to confusion and inconsistency. In general, city areas have curbs, sidewalks and streetlights, and areas in the county do not.

Weed & Seed is a highly structured effort to improve a neighborhood. The U.S. Justice Department will provide as much as \$1million, but demands results. City and county governments are key partners, but residents must join in and sustain the effort. Business investment is critical.

Modesto's Weed & Seed project has officially been under way for 15 months. It's time for a progress report. We're letting pictures tell most of the story, but a few things aren't visible. For example:

Paradise South, like south Modesto, no longer has to put up with the stink from Modesto Tallow. The sickening odor used to drift across the Tuolumne River and through the neighborhood.

County areas are enjoying something city residents have taken for granted: street lighting. More than 300 residences are part of a new lighting district. Many poor residents don't get the earned income tax credits to which they are entitled. So far, 100 people have been assisted in filing, and they've gotten back more than \$130,000.

In summary, there are definite signs of improvement, but also lingering reminders of how much is left to be done. Mostly, there's a sense of possibility.

Bob Schmal, a citizen leader in Weed & Seed, sums it up this way: "We've begun a winning team with a winning attitude. The more little victories we achieve, the more victories are attainable."



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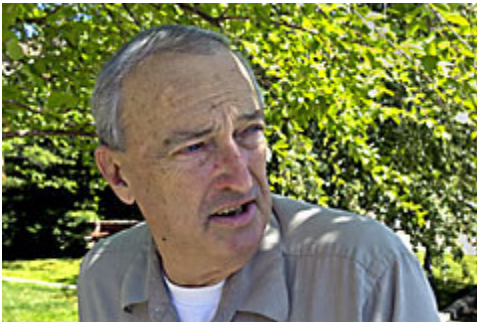


One of the most promising signs in the neighborhood: People taking care of their property. In September 2003, this home in the 1400 block of Faustina Avenue was boarded up and abandoned, an eyesore for neighbors and those driving through the area. Today, the same house is for rent and looks very different after remodeling and repainting, with a new fence around its cleaned-up yard.



Two dozen new homes will be built between Sunset and Roselawn avenues, next to the Sportsmen of Stanislaus Club. This is a major private investment in the area, and new homeowners will bring high expectations for city services.

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Bob Schmal, above, is a citizen leader in Weed & Seed. Illegal dumping is still a problem on Roselawn Avenue.



Although busy Rouse Avenue won't get sidewalks for some time, county officials provided a temporary safety lane for pedestrians by adding pavement and warning dots.

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