

The Joshua Tree

June 10, 2025

THE POWER OF ELECTRICITY

In the windswept Mojave Desert, where the sun beats down relentlessly and open land stretches for miles, a powerful force hums quietly in the distance. This is the High Desert Power Plant, an 830-megawatt natural gas facility nestled on the former



George Air Force Base in Victorville, California. But behind its impressive turbines and high-tech upgrades lies a deeper story of politics, ambition, and one man's enduring influence in the High Desert, as shared this week by former Victorville Mayor **Terry Caldwell**. Terry shared that the High Desert Power Plant was one of the long lasting betterments of Victorville.

At the heart of the plant's origin is **Buck Johns**, who was in attendance today with his wife. Buck was a Newport Beach businessman and founder of Inland Energy. In the late 1990s, Johns and his investor group secured a no-bid contract from the City of Victorville to develop what



would become the High Desert Power Project—also referred to as Victorville 1. The project was ambitious: turning a decommissioned military base into a state-of-the-art power facility capable of feeding the rapidly growing energy demands of Southern California.

By 2003, the plant was operational. But Johns' role didn't end at construction. Inland Energy continued to serve as a consultant to the project, reportedly earning millions in fees for planning and operational support. A 2010 San Bernardino County Grand Jury report later raised questions about the transparency of these contracts and the city's oversight, citing concerns over bond-funded payments and the lack of competitive bidding.

Beyond energy, Johns' influence extended into the region's most valuable resource: water. To operate a power plant of this scale, a steady supply of water for cooling was essential. Allegations arose that Johns played a role in shifting local water board elections to help secure 3,000 acre-feet of water per year for the plant—an amount critics argue could have been used to serve residential needs in the Victor Valley.

These controversies painted a complicated picture: Was Buck Johns a visionary developer pushing the

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This Week's Functionaries

Invocation: Chris Ackerman

Flag Salute: Jim Murray

4-Way Test: Bob Basen

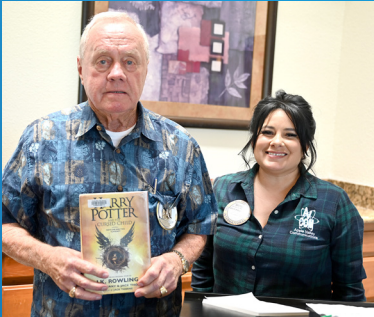
Fine Master: Ryan McEachron



MORALES' MINUTE

It was great to be behind the podium this week, filling in for our President Bryan

Gillespie! It was made even more special to host true Victorville



icons, Terry Caldwell and Buck Johns! Thank you both for your influence and insight with



the High Desert Power Plant.

On September 6th at the Spring Valley Lake Community Center we will have our 75th Anniversary Gala and Fundraiser! You can sign up now to purchase \$250 opportunity drawing tickets that will net someone \$10,000 that night! Each of the 100 tickets for sale include two entries, food, with Fettuccine Alfredo on the menu!

Thank you to Chris Ackerman for volunteering to set up and tear down our luncheon during the 25/26 Rotary year.

Finally, "Be not afraid of growing slowly; be afraid only of standing still".

Arsalee

Terry Caldwell...

Continued from Page 1

High Desert into the future—or a power broker wielding behind-the-scenes influence to the city's detriment?

In recent years, the focus has shifted from the politics of the past to the future of clean, efficient energy. Now owned by Avenue Capital and operated by Middle River Power, the High Desert Power Plant has undergone significant upgrades between 2018 and 2023.

These upgrades not only improved efficiency and environmental compliance but also enabled the plant to better support California's renewable energy grid—serving as a dispatchable power source when solar and wind fall short.

Today, the High Desert Power Plant stands as a hybrid symbol of legacy and innovation. It reflects the ambitions of a developer who helped shape Victorville's industrial footprint—and the evolution of an industry trying to reconcile its carbon-heavy past with a cleaner, more flexible future.

As California accelerates its energy transition, facilities like the High Desert plant—equipped with cleaner technology and future-ready infrastructure—will play a critical role. Whether Buck Johns' legacy is remembered more for his business acumen or the controversies that followed remains to be seen. But one thing is clear: the story of power in the High Desert is far from over.

NEW DATE!

CLUB ASSEMBLY JUNE 24TH

REVIEW AND APPROVE:

Budgets for 2025-2026

Board of Directors for 2025-2026

President for 2027-2028



**THE MAGIC
OF ROTARY**

THE MAGIC OF ROTARY

Big Blue Poker Chip



Jim Cox had the opportunity to draw the Blue Chip but picked green and saved the chance for another.

We will continue next week with 11 chips and \$275 for the lucky Rotarian who can draw the Blue Chip.

Raffle

Guest **Buck Johns** walked away with a Victor Valley Transit bean bag phone holder and **Arsalee Morales** won a VVTA Highlighter set, both from **Chris Ackerman**. The only other raffle prize was a bottle of wine from **Brad Letner** and went home with **Jim Cox**.

Rotary Guests



This week we welcomed **Arsalee Morales'** youngest daughter **Hayden Harris** as a guest, and **Buck & Colleen Johns** from Inland Energy were also in attendance as a guest of **Terry Caldwell**.

Our Stand-in this week was **Stefanie Montoya** for **Bryan Gillespie**.

Spoon of Exception



Bo Goulet had another week with the Spoon and shared that Mojave River Mortgage has introduced their Empowered Down Payment assistance program. A grant, forgiven at loan funding offers up to 3.5% of the purchase price. No income caps, and 1st time buyer status is not required. Available in California, it applies only to 30-year fixed FHA loans. It's a great option to make homeownership more accessible. Reach out to Bo Goulet for more information at (760) 713-6137.

Fine Session



Ryan McEachron was our Fine Master this week and began by rewarding **Maureen Mills** and **Angel Espino** with their Blue Badges and a \$25 hard fine for each!



Jim Cox received a \$20 penalty for claiming he was in attendance as **Terry Caldwell's** guest and the same amount was levied against **Dr. Derek King** for graduating 374 students last week. Doubling up, Maureen Mills was fined \$20 for not having a kids to look after in classes.

The Polio Pig

Collected this week: \$14.00

Collected to Date: \$21,515.83

Total equals: 104,010 Doses!

One dollar equals 2 Doses of Vaccine!
\$500 pays for a Polio Clinic!



VICTORVILLE ROTARY CLUB OFFICERS

Board of Directors

President 2024-2025	Bryan Gillespie
President 2025-2027	Bill Edwards
President 2027 - 2028	Please be Interviewed
Immediate Past President	Steve Murray
Executive Secretary/Foundation/Grants	Margaret Cooker
Treasurer/Scholarships	David North
Youth Services/Ethics Essay	Ron Boyd
Club Service & Membership	Bill Edwards
Community Service/Speech Contests	Please Volunteer
Vocational Service	Please Volunteer
International Service	Ben Tafoya
Member At Large, Young Leaders Contact	Arsalee Morales
Member At Large, Special Projects	Rob Kilpatrick

Members-at-Large: Bob Basen, Darron Poulsen, Angel Espino

Positions & Committee Chairs

BOD/PP Secretary	Pam Murray
Special Billing	Esther Mears (TBD)
Public Service Awards	Please Volunteer
Teacher Mini-Grants	Angel Espino
Dan Stover Music Contest	Angel Espino
Joshua Tree Editor	Chris Ackerman
Read B4K	Please Volunteer
Foundation & Grants	Margaret Cooker
Food Baskets	Bill Edwards
Interact (Junior Rotary)	Please Volunteer
Programs	Mike Page
Fundraising	Stefanie Montoya
S.T.A.R. Students	Angel Espino
Club Learning Facilitator	Please Volunteer

The Victorville Rotary Club meets every Tuesday for fellowship at 11:30 a.m. and meeting at 12:00 noon at the Bear Valley Country Club, 13229 Spring Valley Parkway, Victorville

Make-up Days and Locations

MONDAY:	San Bernardino East, Imperial Palace, noon
TUESDAY:	Rancho Cucamonga Sunrise, 7:15 a.m. Empire Lakes Golf Course Rancho Cucamonga, 12:00 p.m., Etiwanda Gardens
WEDNESDAY:	San Bernardino Crossroads, Hilton, noon, Barstow, DiNapoli's Firehouse, 1358 E Main St, Barstow, CA
THURSDAY:	Apple Valley, Rusty Bull, 13685 John Glenn Rd, Apple Valley, Noon. Ontario, 12:15 p.m., Doubletree Hotel San Bernardino, Denny's at I-15, 7 a.m. Redlands, Masonic Temple, noon
FRIDAY:	San Bernardino North, Elks Lodge, 12:05 p.m.

Calendar Dates

- June 24: Club Assembly**
12:00pm
Bear Valley Country Club
13229 Spring Valley Pkwy
Spring Valley Lake
- July 14: Board of Directors Meeting**
5:00pm Fellowship
5:30pm Board Meeting
Location: Robar Enterprises
17671 Bear Valley Road, Hesperia, CA
- Sept 6: 75th Anniversary Gala/Fundraiser**
6:00pm Dinner • 7:00pm Drawings
Spring Valley Lake Community Center
12975 Rolling Ridge, Spring Valley Lake

Upcoming Programs

- June 17:** Jim Cox, Former Victorville City Manager and Council Member **TOPIC "More Memories"** (Page)
- June 24: Q&A with Jim Cox and Terry Caldwell** (Page) + **Club Assembly**
- July 1:** Colonel Brad Letner (Retired) **TOPIC "Patriot Trends and Tendencies"** (Page)

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