



Border Watch project to rely on local guidance

By Billie Jo Jannen

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BOULEVARD — It was during a brief stop on the winding mountain highways between Otay Mountain and Jacumba that Andy Ramirez said he truly realized what border residents in rural San Diego County are up against.

The 28-year-old founder of Friends of the Border Patrol later told *The Alpine Sun* he had stood by the side of Old Highway 80 in Boulevard and, "We realized we were the only U.S. citizens for miles." *

"We stood there about 20 or 25 minutes," Ramirez said. "It was a reminder that this isn't just about the Border Patrol. This is about American people who are being overwhelmed and overrun in their own homes."

He said it also reminded him of the importance of having input from local residents on the upcoming Border Watch event FBP is planning this fall. Getting that participation has prompted a meeting with Back Country residents this Saturday.

Among the locals already involved in planning the event is Boulevard resident Bob Fox.

Fox and his two sons spent two weekends on the Minute Men project in Arizona earlier this year and is convinced that civil homeland defense is the only way to get government to respond to drug and people smuggling on the U.S.-Mexico border.

"We have to have people on the border," Fox said. "I really believe that the Minute Men have the answer."

Fox said his two sons have already made a documentary of the damage and impacts of illegal border traffic on his property. They are now making one on the Minute Men project, where they collected hours of interviews. Younger son Tim, 16, was the youngest participant, Fox said with some pride. Of the project, itself, he said, "I felt that we were part of a truly grassroots movement."

When Fox and family returned, he was sure that a similar event would benefit East County, so he contacted Friends of the Border Patrol and Ramirez. In addition to hosting the initial meeting with residents, he is to plan local logistics, adding that contingency planning was among the Minute Men's problems — and one that Border Watch will seek to improve on.

Ramirez said he became interested in the border after he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, at the age of 22. Frequent trips to the emergency room and delays in getting help because of overcrowding got his attention: "I would look around and there were wall to wall people and none of them spoke English. U.S citizens couldn't even get a bed."

In subsequent years, he became involved in politics, first as a press secretary for another candidate's run and later as a candidate for the California Assembly.* As part of the political process in California, and a close observer of the Prop 187 debate, Ramirez said, "I didn't like

some of the things I saw coming out of Sacramento."

After 911 pushed the issue of the U.S.-Mexico border to the fore as a security threat, Ramirez said he was appalled at the hyperbole that was coming out of Homeland Security about its grip on the border. He knew this to be untrue and was even more disgusted when Homeland Security officials halted efforts by the U.S. Border Patrol to perform workplace enforcement in North County.

He started Friends of Border Patrol in August of 2004.

Both Fox and Ramirez reiterated that Border Watch will be an unarmed observe-and-report operation.

Ramirez said that, to date, he has close to 800 applicants to come down to rural East County and expects that there will be between 2,000 and 3,000 by the time it begins.

Originally slated to start Aug. 1, Border Watch has been moved back to Sept. 16 to give organizers time to check out each applicant. He said that about 85 percent are from Southern California, including Back Country applicants, and 15 percent are from points all over the United States.

Ramirez said he hopes the effects are lasting and feels that having local residents in the lead of the project will help to achieve that:

"I don't want this to be a case of a political person coming in here for a big dog and pony show and then leaving," Ramirez said. "This is about community. We need to know what our government and the American people can do to help our fellow citizens."

*Note: Minor edits for accuracy and safety purposes