



For Immediate Release March 24, 2008

***Diane Brossart
Valley Forward Association
(602) 240-2408***

***Zenobia Mertel
Olson Communications, Inc.
(602) 595-6992***

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

REGION SCORES HIGH GRADES IN VALLEY FORWARD ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT CARD

PHOENIX (March 24, 2008) – Despite staggering growth, Valley communities are doing an above average job of balancing environmental quality with economic development, according to “*Making the Grade: The Valley’s 2008 Environmental Report Card*,” released by Valley Forward Association today.

The communities, along with Maricopa and Pinal Counties, were evaluated in four subject areas including air, land use, transportation and water. Phoenix was the only municipality to receive straight A’s, however, Glendale, Gilbert, Scottsdale, Tempe and Peoria were not far behind with only a few A-minuses precluding a perfect score in those cities.

Communities that demonstrated significant improvement in environmental performance compared to the association’s last issue of the report card in 2004 are the town of Fountain Hills and Pinal County. Among communities with populations of less than 50,000, Queen Creek for the third consecutive report card fared the best, however, the town’s grades slipped slightly this time.

Grades were based on a questionnaire completed by 16 Valley communities, as well as Maricopa and Pinal Counties. Eight municipalities and three Indian communities failed to respond after repeated contact, resulting in undetermined participation in regional issues.

“The strong leadership and innovative solutions our cities, towns and counties are demonstrating is impressive, and perhaps most encouraging is evidence of more coordinated regional efforts in this report card over our last publication in 2004,” said Diane Brossart, president of Valley Forward. “Our goal was to examine how communities are individually and collectively addressing issues that impact the livability and sustainability of our region.”

The only community to receive an F – a failing mark – was Goodyear in the transportation category. The poor grade was due, in part, to a lack of responsiveness to the questionnaire. However, from the community’s response, it’s evident that Goodyear has been focused on rapid growth, and does not have a transportation master plan in place. Valley Forward noted Goodyear must recognize that planning for record growth should address transportation needs in order to maintain quality of life for residents.

Add 1/Valley Forward Report Card

The town of Carefree also received an unimpressive grade in Transportation – a D for placing minimal emphasis on transportation planning. The municipality noted that it “does not have critical mass to support transit.” Valley Forward did, however, commend both Goodyear and Carefree for participating in the report card and encouraged their involvement in regional efforts to improve the Valley’s environment.

Particularly disappointing from Valley Forward's perspective is the town of Buckeye's failure to respond to its report card survey this time around; the community participated in 2004 and has more than tripled in size since that time, growing from a population of 11,955 in 2004 to approximately 40,467 today.

The city of Surprise was commended for responding to this year’s report card survey, considering the fast growing community did not participate in the evaluation in 2004.

Additional findings of the report card include:

- **AIR** – Ironically, communities fared best in the air category, despite the region’s significant problem with particulate pollution. Valley Forward reported that cities and towns are doing a good job of adopting policies and taking action in areas “within their control” – government, business and residents need to do more. Meeting the challenge of cleaning the Valley’s air will take a committed mindset and action by all sectors to make real change happen.
- **LAND USE** – The majority of Valley municipalities address policies and regulations related to infill and economic development strategies quite well. Most communities are also doing a good to excellent job in providing for open space and recreation. New to this volume of the report card is a look at the rapidly growing acceptance of the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system as a benchmark to measure a facility’s environmental performance. Responses ranged from Scottsdale’s status as first in the nation to adopt the Gold Standard to no recognition at all by some municipalities. Valley Forward is encouraged that Maricopa and Pinal Counties are starting to look at what is being described as the Sun Corridor megapolitan, as a place requiring better planning and communication between jurisdictions.
- **TRANSPORTATION** – The region has experienced significant progress in the area of transportation since the 2004 report card. Voters reauthorized the countywide one-half cent transportation sales tax, providing more than \$15 billion to fund new freeways, roads and transit options, including the next phase of the Valley’s light rail system. Yet as Valley Forward issues its 2008 report card, transportation continues to present major and often times vexing challenges that will require continued focus and regional cooperation.
- **WATER** – Valley communities are demonstrating a strong commitment to long-range planning in the area of water management, which includes diversified conservation programs, recharge and drought preparedness. However, almost without exception, cities and towns that rely on private water utilities either did not respond on this issue or do not have open communication with the utilities serving their citizens. This is a concern for Valley Forward because many of these areas are outlying and experiencing high rates of population growth. Larger Valley cities are not only protecting aquifers by participating in recharge programs, but many are also taking advantage of reclaimed supplies by using this supply to water public parks, golf courses and other public amenities that enhance the quality of life for Valley residents.

-more-

Add 2/Valley Forward Report Card

Valley Forward will discuss its findings at an 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. luncheon on March 26 at the Wyndham Phoenix. The event is open to the public at \$50 per person and will feature remarks by representatives from entities that participated in “*Making the Grade: The Valley’s 2008 Environmental Report Card.*” To register for the luncheon, call (602) 240-2408.

Valley Forward brings business and civic leaders together to convene thoughtful public dialogue on regional issues and to promote cooperative efforts to improve the environment and livability of Valley communities. For more information on Valley Forward or to view the report card online, visit www.valleyforward.org.