

# REGISTRAR SET TO MOVE INTO NEW DIGS TUESDAY

## Move signals completion of \$429 million County Operations Center

By [Mark Walker \(/staff/mark-walker/\)](#) 12:01 a.m. Nov. 28, 2013

After 142 elections and decades of providing voter and campaign services from a cavernous building on Ruffin Road, the San Diego County Registrar of Voters is moving to new digs.

For the county, it's more than just a move. The registrar's relocation also signals the completion of the \$429 million County Operations Center, a complex of buildings just off Overland Drive in Kearny Mesa that houses several county departments and nearly 3,000 workers.

The election division is the last department to relocate to the five-building campus.

Registrar Michael Vu said that while the aged Ruffin Road offices have been sufficient for his staff and county residents, he and his 64 full-time employees are eager for the move into the two-story, \$75 million Registrar of Voters Building.

"There's a lot of character in this old building, but it's served its useful life," Vu said. "The new one has a different feel with a lot more energy and better efficiency of space."

The registrar's first official day for the public at the new headquarters is Dec. 9, a day when election workers are expected to be completing the canvassing of San Diego's Nov. 19 special mayoral election.

County supervisors approved the Operations Center master plan in the spring of 2008, breaking ground on the first phase a year later.

What was once a collection of 20 aging county buildings is now the most modern government center in the county, constructed with green building techniques that have garnered state and national awards and decorated throughout with commissioned artwork.

The complex's first piece was a \$59 million medical examiner's facility opened in December 2009. The second phase was completed in 2010 for \$168 million, which added two four-story office buildings and an adjacent seven-story parking structure.

Among the departments now headquartered there are planning and development services, environmental health, public works and parks and recreation. The center also is home to the county fire authority, auditor and veterans services offices and the county's contracted public defenders.

Other than a \$112 million bond issued in 2009, the county paid cash for the complex, saving on financing costs.

Supervisors opted for new construction rather than a retrofit of the older buildings after a study showed maintenance costs would exceed \$216 million over 20 years.

They decided that consolidating scattered county operations into a central complex and shedding expensive leases was the way to go.

Ron Roberts, chairman of the five-member county Board of Supervisors, hailed the completion of the operations center.

"It's like a little dream come true," he said. "We've completely transformed everything that used to be there into something that I think gives employees a little extra spring in their step and serves the public well."

For Vu, the 118,000-square-foot Registrar of Voters Building also provides better work space for the up to 800 seasonal workers his office employs at general election time.

"We will be housed in one area and that's going to help," he said.

The reception area for cars and trucks delivering completed Election Day ballots is also larger and closer to where the votes actually get tallied.

Most public services are available just inside the first-floor main entrance. Candidate and campaign services are located on the second floor.

The décor includes a variety of election equipment used over the years, historical photos and old logos, and a new sculpture in front of the building, a pair of blue ceramic heads banded in red that sit atop a pedestal facing one another.

"To me, they represent what the county really is, and that's people," Roberts said.

The artwork is part of about \$2 million in commissioned pieces spread throughout each of the buildings.

The works were funded from the one-half of 1 percent of the costs of the buildings the supervisors set aside for art.

While now complete, the Operations Center master plan allows for two more office buildings and an additional parking garage if needed someday.

The large, warehouse-like Ruffin Road facility that housed the registrar and many other county departments for decades has been sold to Kaiser Permanente, which is putting a large medical complex on the site.

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