

Maddy Institute promotes public policy



Maddy Institute interns gather in front of the state Capitol in April 2011. Executive Director Mark Kepler is on the left. SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Kenneth L. Maddy Institute is a nonpartisan political think tank for the purpose of promoting awareness of public policy and fostering leadership for the San Joaquin Valley.

The Maddy Institute is acquiring a reputation as one of the most effective agencies in California, the premier one in the Valley, for generating interest and dialogue in public policy.

Viewpoint asked Mika Petrucci, administrative assistant of the Maddy Institute, to explain the institute and its activities.

Viewpoint: How did the Maddy Institute originate and what is its mission?

Mika Petrucci: The Kenneth L. Maddy Institute at California State University, Fresno, is a nonpartisan public policy institute established by a unanimous vote of the California Legislature in 1999 to honor the legacy of one of California's most principled and effective legislative leaders of the last half of the 20th century.

The mission of the Maddy Institute is to inspire citizen participation, elevate government performance, provide nonpartisan analysis and assist in providing solutions for public policy issues important to the region, state and nation.

Viewpoint: What kind of activities are you involved in?

Petrucci: The institute's work is focused in three key areas: government leadership, policy analysis and citizen participation.

Our work in the area of government leadership involves preparing the next generation of political and governmental leaders. Each year, the Maddy Institute selects about 40 students from regional universities (California State Universities, Fresno, Stanislaus and Bakersfield; University of California, Merced, and Cal Poly) as Legislative Scholar interns. Legislative Scholar interns are placed on assignment in government offices throughout the Valley, as well as in Sacramento and Washington, D.C.

The policy analysis aspect of the Institute involves providing research to elected officials, public managers and citizens that is a nonpartisan, interdisciplinary and fact-driven analysis of the issues. Our programs in this area include:

- 'The Maddy Report': "The Maddy Report" is our weekly public affairs TV program covering how state and federal policy and politics affect California, generally, and the San Joaquin Valley, in particular. It is broadcast on KVPT (Valley PBS), KSEE (NBC Fresno) and the Cal Channel (statewide).

The goal of "The Maddy Report" is to encourage a deeper understanding of the issues facing our nation, state and region through a thoughtful, objective, fair and civilized exchange of ideas. The program is moderated by the Maddy Institute's executive director, Mark Keppler, as he speaks with national, state and regional leaders and experts on the issues of the day, as well as a roundtable discussion with invited political reporters and columnists.

- Maddy Daily: Daily, award-winning, free e-newsletter that chronicles politics and public policy issues occurring in the San Joaquin Valley. Currently, The Maddy Daily has more than 10,000 subscribers.
- Maddy Political Insider: Weekly, half-hour public policy radio segment on 940AM KYNO's "Straight Talk with Bill McEwen." The Maddy Institute's board of directors rotates calling in each week. The Political Insider is heard from Sacramento to Bakersfield.

Our work in the area of citizen participation involves engaging citizens of all ages and inspiring them to follow Sen. Ken Maddy's example of active citizen participation.

The intent of the Maddy Associates program is to bring together a diverse array of distinguished state and national speakers to discuss topics of importance to our region, our state and our nation. Maddy Associate Luncheons are a place where community leaders and those concerned about our region can learn and debate issues of public concern.

Viewpoint: How would you rate the public policy IQ of people in the San Joaquin Valley?

Petrucci: Those who are interested will take the time to understand the facts; those who aren't won't. As a whole, the San Joaquin Valley has a lot of public policies issues that we face and it's important to remember that regardless of political affiliation, we all call the Valley our home. We need to continue to push our legislators to act in the best interest of the Valley by working with other elected officials, from both sides of the aisle, to make decisions that will benefit the San Joaquin Valley as a whole.

Viewpoint: Have public policy issues become too complicated for most people to understand, so they don't bother?

Petrucci: Quite possibly. Trying to stay current on public policy issues can be difficult. The Maddy Institute recognizes this problem and we work hard to ensure that our publications are to the point and informative. The host of "The Maddy Report," Mark Keppler, provokes fair and factual discussions of policy issues while ensuring that our topics remain relatable to viewers.

Anyone who feels like public policy issues have become too complicated, watch an episode of "The Maddy Report" and let us know what you think!

Viewpoint: How have your efforts been received by folks?

Petrucci: To this day, some 15 years after Maddy left office, he remains to be one of the most respected and popular public servants of his time. It is because of his legacy that the Maddy Institute has experienced the success that we have.

Just mentioning the name "Maddy" will most always result in amusing stories, remarkable accomplishments and cherished memories of a person who left his mark on not only the San Joaquin Valley but the state of California as well.

Viewpoint: Would you say there is a lack of bipartisan vehicles for advancing public policy in California? If so, how can we change that?

Petrucci: Most definitely — especially in a state like California that is as diverse as we are, there has to be more of an effort to encourage our elected officials to compromise for the betterment of the whole.

Becoming more bipartisan is no easy task, but I think the Maddy Institute is definitely making its mark by way of positive change.

By inspiring citizen participation, providing nonpartisan analysis of current topics and assisting in providing solutions for public policy issues, the Maddy Institute is well on its way to being a noticeable contributor to bipartisanship in the state.

Viewpoint: Need for effective leadership is a serious issue in California. How does the Maddy Institute address that need? Where will our future leaders come from?

Petrucci: One of my favorite things about the Maddy Institute (and working for the institute) is the Legislative Scholar Internship Program. A key component of our mission is to enhance government leadership by preparing the next generation of political and governmental leaders.

The Maddy Institute provides more than 40 internship opportunities in legislative offices throughout the year. These positions are accompanied by scholarships, funded almost solely through donations, as well as invaluable experience that cannot be found in any other work environment.

As a past Maddy intern, I can attest to the one-of-a-kind experience of work in a legislative office as well as the support the institute offers our interns during and following the internship.

Viewpoint: What is the best way for people to help both raise awareness of public policy issues and provide a pool of effective leaders?

Petrucci: Find something that strikes interest and go with it! The leadership aspect comes with time, as I am currently learning. Raising awareness of issues is what the Maddy Institute works every day to do. It's a matter of informing people with solely the facts and, with that knowledge, encouraging active citizen participation by following the example of Maddy.