

# LOS ANGELES DAILY NEWS

## **Funds flow to Reseda council**

*Hahn touts move as next step in neighborhood empowerment*

**By James Nash**  
**Staff Writer**

**Wednesday, March 19, 2003** -VAN NUYS -- Mayor James Hahn opened the spigot Tuesday for funding Los Angeles' network of 63 advisory councils, saying the money represents a crucial step for the city's experiment in neighborhood empowerment.

Members of the Reseda Neighborhood Council spent \$65.23 at a Van Nuys office supplies store Tuesday morning, becoming the fourth neighborhood council in Los Angeles -- and the first in the San Fernando Valley -- to spend part of the \$3 million in city funds earmarked for the panels this year. About a third of the city now has a neighborhood council.

Hahn, who joined the Reseda group at Office Depot, said the money will help councils reach their goal of giving residents a stronger voice at City Hall.

"I think this is a way the government is returning power to the people in the neighborhoods," Hahn said.

Some critics charge that councils, created by the 1999 voter-approved new City Charter, have no real power and that the city has been slow in approving and funding them. Others say the city is essentially handing a blank check to quasi-public officials with little accountability.

Each neighborhood council can receive up to \$50,000 in city money per year, split into four installments. The councils may use the money to buy office supplies, cater community events, repair furniture, and install telephone and Internet connections, among other uses. But they may not hire staff members, lease office space or spend on certain things such as discos, alcohol or trips to massage parlors.

Reseda's neighborhood council bought a money safe, binders, highlighters and other office supplies.

It was the first in the Valley to receive a prepaid debit card for purchases because it has elected a board and sent its treasurer through training on how to use the money, said Greg Nelson, general manager of the Department of

Neighborhood Empowerment, the city agency responsible for the neighborhood councils.

Some other neighborhood councils are torn by internal strife. The Van Nuys Neighborhood Council, for instance, is locked in a dispute over the validity of its election; some activists charge that the election was tainted by electioneering near the polling place.

Still, Hahn on Tuesday pronounced the city's experiment in neighborhood empowerment a success so far.

"This second year (of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment) has been very impressive to me to have 63 certified and more in the pipeline," he said.