As we approach that time of year when we pause to reflect upon the past and consider what we desire for the future, I would like to do so with regard to the status of health and well-being in Fresno County.

We understand that, currently, our county ranks near the bottom of California counties in such measurements. However, rather than acquiesce, I offer six holiday wishes for public health in Fresno County and urge each of us as “pillars of public health” to coalesce to make real the vision of a truly healthy Fresno County. I offer six holiday wishes for public health and urge each of us as “pillars of public health” to make real the vision of a truly healthy Fresno County.

I wish that every student graduate from high school fully prepared to continue the pursuit of his or her particular career interest, instilled with self-confidence and respect for others, fully versed in the meaning and value of health, and with the life skills and knowledge necessary for their attainment. This is possible when:

- Every school truly values, and has the resources and will to guide (beginning in early preschool), each and every student through any and all obstacles and barriers to success (physical, academic, behavioral and social).
- Every school incorporates health awareness into every aspect of the curriculum, from the classroom, to the cafeteria, to the play and sport environment.
- Each child in every family is given every opportunity to learn, grow, develop and mature in a safe and loving environment.
- I wish for rates of chronic disease and premature death well below those in the rest of the nation. This is possible when:

Retailers value the promotion of healthy foods and beverages over promotion of sugary beverages, tobacco products and alcohol, and make healthy foods and beverages readily available and reasonably priced.

Everyone has the opportunity to access, and does access, a medical provider (both physical and mental health) not only early in an illness, but regularly when not ill, to enhance prevention of illness.

Each of us makes the effort to be physically active on a regular basis; devises and follows a healthy eating plan; avoids tobacco products and moderates any alcohol use.

All neighborhoods are safe and hazard-free.

I wish for each of us to breathe the cleanest air in the country. This is possible when:

- Governments and agencies design and develop convenient, energy-efficient, low-cost transit systems connecting all outlying communities to metropolitan hubs and each other. In each community, these hubs would be well incorpo-rated within their own complex of safe and attractive bicycle and walk pathways and all of life’s amenities made easily accessible within all neighborhoods.

- Governments, agencies and manufacturers ensure that real incentive to purchase and maintain zero- or low-emission vehicles is available to all.

- Each of us observes the no-burn rules, drives only when there is no alternative, avoids the use of two-stroke gasoline engines and avoids drive-thrus.

- I wish for no deaths from vehicular accidents. This is possible when:

- Each of us, when we do drive, does so with full focus, is respectful of others and properly restrained in our seats.

- Governments and agencies devise the safest possible pedestrian-vehicle interfaces.

- Governments and agencies enhance and maximally enforce DUI and distracted-driving laws.

- I wish for teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease to become things of the past. This is possible when:

- Families, churches and schools lay the foundation for healthy relationships in our youth.

- Individuals adopt safe sexual behaviors.

Finally, I wish that all persons, for whom insurmountable obstacles have made attaining well-being and full potential virtually impossible, are readily identified and then guided to the appropriate resources needed to overcome those obstacles. This is possible when:

- Resources and efforts are enhanced by social services, mental health services, law enforcement and halls of justice.

- Each of us has a genuine concern for those around us.

Great opportunity exists for public health in Fresno County. As the economy turns around and outside agencies (public and private) begin to see the wisdom in directing significant resources to our community, we must come together as individuals, families, businesses, and public and private agencies to effectively intertwine our talents, energies, and resources toward mutual goals.

- Dr. Ken Bird is the public health officer for the Fresno County Department of Public Health. More about the “pillars of public health” can be found at www.fresnoca.org.