

One Voice given credit for new freeway

By John M. Derby

For years Merced County has taken a back seat in freeway development but last Friday a the second major groundbreaking this year was held to announce the start of another freeway project on Highway 99.

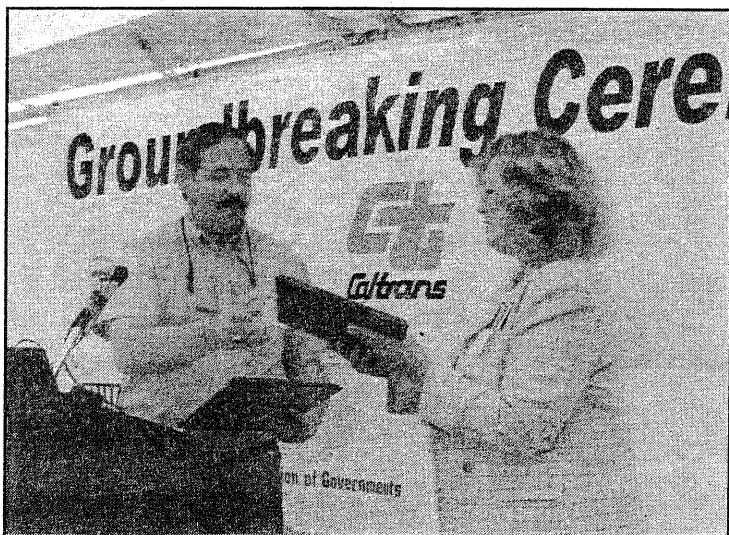
This project will bring a stretch of Highway 99 from Livingston to Cressey Way in Atwater up to full freeway status providing six lanes of traffic..

Seventy five people attended an outdoor ceremony near Arena Way Friday at which time a formal groundbreaking was held and pictures were taken of members of Merced County Association of Governments and Cal Trans officials.

During the ceremony remarks were made by Supervisor Deidre Kelsey, chairman of



MAKE WAY FOR THE FREEWAY--Officials from Merced County, Atwater and Livingston joined Cal Trans and elected representatives at the traditional shovelling of the dirt ceremony on location between Livingston and Atwater on Highway 99 which will become a six lane freeway. From left to right is Stacie Dabbs, representing Congressman Dennis Cardoza, Livingston Mayor Brandon Friesen, Supervisor Deidre Kelsey, chairman MCAG, Supervisor John Pedroza, Kome Ajise, Dist. Director Caltrans, Ed Abercrombie, Atwater City Council, Mary Ward, rep. of Barbara Matthews and Steve Jones, County Clerk.



HONORING MCAG--Mike Nelson, Chairman of the Merced County Board of Supervisors presented a plaque to Supervisor Deidre Kelsey for the Merced County Association of Governments part in bringing two major highway improvements to Merced County.

MCAG, Supervisor Mike Nelson, chairman of the board of Supervisors and Brandon Friesen the Mayor of Livingston.

The term "One Voice" stood out in the remarks from several

officials pointing out how important it has been for the county and its cities to focus on one project at a time rather than all fighting over which project is needed most in the county.

Kelsey said "This project dem-

onstrates what can be done when there is cooperation toward a goal."

Merced County has suffered because for many years the allocation of state highway funds was based on population. Since Merced County has very little population per mile of roadway, it was placed on a very low priority.

The laws which ruled on highway construction were changed several years ago and Merced County's projects were

given higher priority however the state's income hit bottom at the same time. This latest project was postponed over one year.

It represents one of the last links in the Highway 99 system which still did not have full freeway status, meaning side roads actually cut right across the highway making it very dangerous for traffic getting on and off the freeway.