

Communiqué

Spring 2009

THE JUNE LIGHTNING SIEGE

plus more inside:

Project Playhouse

Saving Little Smokey



CAL FIRE

California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection

From the Director

As you might imagine, I feel tremendously honored to have been appointed by Governor Schwarzenegger to be your director and chief. When I started with what was then known as the California Division of Forestry on June 22, 1971, my only goal was to go to my first fire without messing up. Although I had to wait several days before my first test, I have plenty of memories of that first summer. Bear in mind that orientation and safety training was largely done “on the job” in those days. I recall thinking several times while clinging to many smoking hillsides with lungs burning and body aching, “Why am I doing this to myself?” That thought always vanished quickly after some food and rest.

I had similar thoughts as I stayed the course at Hartnell College and Humboldt State University in order to eventually earn a degree in Forestry.

Tenacity seems to be a theme in my life.

Oddly enough, the first question asked during my first media interview as director was, “Why the heck would you want to do this job?” I laughed because I had asked myself the same question many times. It also took me back to the thoughts I had that first summer so many years ago. I would like to share with you how I came to the decision to take on this position and some of what you can expect of me.

Last May, I received a late-night call from Chief Grijalva at my home in Redding. He wanted to meet at the San Jose Airport the following morning so we could attend Governor Schwarzenegger’s visit to the Summit Fire base in Gilroy. During the course of the day, we talked about his plans for the future and about potential successor candidates for director in which he indicated I was in the pool of candidates. After considering the possibility for a couple of weeks, I met with him again and expressed my interest in learning more about the duties of the director. That meeting led to my detail as the Executive Officer.

As I considered the prospect of assuming this office, I outlined my thoughts on paper. I won’t go into great detail, but I will share with you my personal beliefs which lead me to take on this considerable challenge, one I had not seriously considered prior to that day in May.

I am keenly aware of the transition we have recently experienced due to many retirements, and I anticipate another turnover in the supervisory and management ranks. These changes, coupled with the difficult economic times our state and country is enduring, makes continuity of leadership extremely important to CAL FIRE. My management philosophies are very similar to those of Chief Grijalva who has been known to say, “Leadership is caring more about others than you do about yourself.” I have been very impressed with what he has done for us and have learned much from him. In fact, if not for his leadership, I might very well be retired now.

Throughout my career I have heard the sentiment that it would be great to have a director that worked their way through the ranks...someone who knew the department. I can’t claim to have done it all, but have experience in most of the fire ranks and have some experience in resource management.

Portraits of all of our directors hang in the conference room attached to my office. Every time I look at the portrait of Dick Ernest, our eighth director and one who also worked his way through the ranks, I can’t help thinking he felt the same way. I know there are many of you who are capable of achieving this, too.

I do not intend to make dramatic changes in the direction we have benefited from during Chief Grijalva’s tenure. I was in agreement with the plan he unveiled after his first 100 days of office and am considering only minor course corrections. I intend to engage my Executive Team (Chief Deputy Director, State Fire Marshal, Deputy Director of Fire Protection and Region Chiefs) in



collaborative decision making. Others will be involved, as well. The resultant decisions will be widely communicated with accompanying reason, once vetted and agreed upon.

Principles I hold in high regard are honesty, respect and adherence to our established chains of command. Expect me to enforce chain of command, and I will tolerate neither dishonesty nor disrespect.

As on my first day so many years ago, I will strive to meet the demands of the position with which I have been entrusted. The encouragement and faith so many of you have expressed these past weeks has been both gratifying and humbling.

Assemblyman Jim Nielson recently referred to my new position as being “a great honor and a great burden.” The burden is lighter in knowing that I work with competent professionals on whom I can depend, and this honor is shared by all of us that make CAL FIRE the finest organization I know!

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Del Walters". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Del Walters, Chief
Director



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Project Playhouse

By Sarah Jane O'Keefe, volunteer in prevention, San Bernardino Unit

HomeAid, the charitable arm of the Building Industry Association, has a mission to build transitional housing for homeless families. As an annual fundraiser to help build and update these shelters across the country, HomeAid created "Project Playhouse." For over 15 years "Project Playhouse" has found support in the home building industry, and as a result they have not only built unique and creative playhouses, but have also raised over \$4,000,000 for HomeAid.

For the first time, CAL FIRE was able to participate in this wonderful charity by building the Prado Lookout Tower Playhouse. Due to the recession in the building industry, the Inland Empire Chapter of HomeAid could not find enough contractors to help in their fundraiser, so they contacted San Ber-

nardino Unit Chief Tom O'Keefe. Chief O'Keefe found eager volunteers for the project at the Prado Conservation Camp. Division Chief Arnie White became the primary project administrator, and Heavy Equipment Mechanic John Miller designed and supervised the project. While searching for sponsors Chief White got in touch with Ron Rezek Jr. of Rezek Incident Support and found complete funding.

This one-of-a-kind playhouse was not only designed and supervised by Prado's own, but it was also built by nine inmates at the Camp who volunteered their evenings and weekends to complete the playhouse on time. The scaled-down lookout featured a full catwalk, replica fire finder, radio, and a dispatch soundtrack all atop a four foot platform. Not

only did the lookout feature plenty to keep children's imaginations at play, it also featured beautiful handcrafted furniture including a stand for the fire finder, cabinets, and counter tops.

Outside the lookout there was even more to admire. This playhouse had everything an aspiring firefighter or forester needed for hours of play. Everything from the landscaping to the flagpole with a solar spotlight, and even the anemometer, were perfectly scaled and created with not only pure craftsmanship, but also with sincerity. Many of the inmates who worked on this playhouse had either personally received help from a HomeAid shelter or their family had. Five other playhouses joined CAL FIRE's and were displayed at Victoria Gardens, in Rancho Cucamonga, from August 23



to September 27. The public was not only able to buy tickets to tour all of the wonderful playhouses, but they were also able to purchase raffle tickets for one of the playhouses. On September 20 CAL FIRE was at Victoria Gardens to promote the fundraiser. Complete with Smokey Bear, CAL FIRE set up a display of local fire engines, a 1964 Model 1 fire engine from the CDF Museum, a bulldozer, an emergency crew transport and a Model 34 engine. Posters and displays around the Lookout Tower carried messages about CAL FIRE's mission, "Why 100 Feet" and Forest Care. There were nearly 11,000 public contacts during the display.

On auction night five of the six playhouses in this year's "Project Playhouse" were auctioned off while the fifth was won by a raffle drawing. When it came time for the best playhouse to be auctioned off, (that might be a little bias) the Lookout Tower raised \$13,000 for HomeAid. The attention to detail and professional quality of work put into this extraordinarily life-like playhouse earned the Prado Lookout Tower Playhouse the Chairman's Award on the night of the auction.

Overall, the fundraiser was a major success, raising \$65,000 in auction sales alone. This money will be going directly to HomeAid to assist with their current projects in the Inland Empire.

One special recipient of Home Aid Inland Empire charity work is California Institution for Women (CIW) in Chino. CIW is the home of CAL FIRE's Training Center for female inmate firefighters destined for fire crews at Rainbow, Puerta La Cruz, and Los Angeles County. An additional 18 beds are being added to the CIW birthing center courtesy of Home Aid Inland Empire. The birthing center

at CIW allows pregnant women who enter the penal system to remain with their children after birth for a longer period of time than would be possible using a traditional hospital only. This project is valued at \$150,000. CAL FIRE's participation with Project Playhouse raised almost half the money needed for this important project that will either directly or indirectly benefit CAL FIRE crew members.

To find out more about HomeAid and Project Playhouse, visit www.homeaidie.org or www.playhouseie.com.

Current HomeAid Projects		
Shelter	Services	Location
Mary's Mercy Center	homeless pregnant women and their children	San Bernardino
California Institute for Women	newborns of imprisoned women	Chino
Mercy House	homeless men, women and families	Ontario
Olive Crest	abused and homeless children	Coachella



Governor Awards Medal of Valor to Seven CAL FIRE Employees

By Rosa Hernandez, special assistant to the director, Sacramento Headquarters

On December 9, 2008, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger recognized the extraordinary bravery and heroism of 42 State employees by awarding them the Governor's Medal of Valor. Seven CAL FIRE employees received the Medal of Valor, the highest honor California bestows upon its public servants.

"Everyday our firefighters come to work knowing that today they may be asked to risk their life to save another," said Chief Del Walters, Director of CAL FIRE. "Today we honor those, who with incredible bravery risked it all," Walters said at the event.

CAL FIRE Medal of Valor Awardees:

On May 18, 2008, Deputy State Fire Marshal John Guhl observed a vehicle erratically driving next to a fifteen-foot rock-faced cliff embankment. He was successful in stopping the disoriented, male driver from injuring himself and others with his vehicle. Fire Marshal Guhl of Sacramento received the Silver Medal of Valor.

On May 31, 2007, Captain Wesley D. Grim responded to a house fire that was fully engulfed with heavy smoke and flames coming out of the windows. Informed that an infant was trapped in the back bedroom and several attempts to rescue the infant had failed due to the intense heat and smoke, Captain Grim decided to make one last attempt and entered through the bedroom window. Searching through the smoke filled room, he found the infant in the far corner. Re-tracing his way back to the window, Captain Grim handed the infant to a police officer who immediately transferred the infant to the hospital. Captain Grim of Visalia received the Gold Medal of Valor.

On October 21, 2007, Captain Carl Schwettmann, Jr., assisting with medical treatment of a CAL FIRE engine crew suffering from severe burns from the Harris Fire, was informed that a firefighter was missing and presumed dead. Captain Schwettmann drove through intense heat and smoke to find the missing firefighter and was able to quickly find the

missing firefighter who had suffered 2nd degree burns over his entire body. Captain Schwettmann called for a helicopter to transport the severely injured firefighter to the hospital. The rescued firefighter made a full recovery and was able to return to duty. Captain Schwettmann of El Cajon received the Gold Medal of Valor.

On December 28, 2007, Captain Eric A. Ayers responded to an emergency dispatch where a passenger vehicle had lost control due to ice, which traveled down a 30-foot embankment and landed in four feet of water in the Susan River. Captain Ayers arrived at the scene, slid down the snow-covered embankment, and entered the icy water. Swimming to the vehicle, he found a woman suspended upside down by her seatbelt with her head under water. Captain Ayers, using his knife, cut the seatbelt loose, freed the woman from the vehicle and assisted her back to the riverbank. Captain Ayers of Susanville received the Gold Medal of Valor.

On February 2, 2008, Fire Apparatus Engineer James Allen and Firefighter Franklin Johnson were dispatched to a well-established, residential structure fire. After hearing reports that a child was inside the home, Allen and Johnson entered the home in search of a 12-year old boy. They found the boy, picked him up and got him safely outside where he was transported to the hospital. Engineer Allen and Firefighter Johnson of Mariposa received the Gold Medal of Valor.

On May 13, 2008, Forestry Equipment Manager Corey Call noticed a vehicle drifting into the opposite bound traffic lane. Call immediately made a U-turn and found the vehicle had crossed over the center divide and crashed into a group of trees. Call, crawling through a broken window into the smoke-filled car, made several attempts to pull the driver out of the car. Unfortunately, the limited space and damage to the car made it difficult to pull the women out. Forestry Equipment Manager Call of St. Helena received the Gold Medal of Valor.

What Makes a Hero?

By Leah Sandberg, fire prevention specialist, Lassen-Modoc Unit

What makes a hero? One definition is “someone who goes above and beyond what’s expected of them, beyond their duty in order to help those in need, usually at significant risk to their own life.”

What makes Eric Ayers a hero? – Exactly that. The morning of December 28, 2007, arrived with temperatures in the 20s. Old Mother Nature had tucked the town of Susanville in the night before with a thin blanket of snow that softened the landscape and trimmed the rivers and streams with ice. Bonnie Hull was on her way to work at the doctor’s office that morning when her Honda SUV hit a patch of black ice. The vehicle lost traction and slid to the right towards a ditch. Beginning to panic, she used her brakes and cut the steering wheel to the left to avoid the ditch, which caused the vehicle to spin. She took her hands from the wheel and let God take control. “Whatever happens, happens,” she thought “and there’s nothing I can do about it at this point.”

Her SUV stopped spinning when it hit a tree where it flipped onto its roof and slid down a 30 foot bank and into the icy Susan River. The water quickly entered the vehicle. Like an intruder, it pressed against the windows, cracking the glass trying to get in. Seeking the path of least resistance, it reached its icy fingers into whatever opening it could find to enter the vehicle. Bonnie tried to unhook her seatbelt only to find it locked into place. She began to feel frightened for the first time. She tried desperately to keep her head above the rapidly rising water.



Eric Ayers receiving Medal of Valor from Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

She saw her purse floating nearby and grabbed her cell phone. She dialed 9-1-1 and got the operator: a voice to reassure her and a chance at hope. The operator stayed on the line with her, telling her help was on the way. The water was cold and Bonnie’s arms began to tire as she tried to hold herself up and out of the water. She had to drop the phone in order to gain better purchase and her fear soon returned as the lifeline she had with the operator was lost.

Soon the water was up to Bonnie’s neck and she knew it would be only a moment before it was over her head. She wondered if this was the end; if this was her time to die. She thought about how it would feel to drown. She imagined that even if she did drown, the cold water might give the rescuers a chance to revive her. She felt a soul rending loneliness she had never felt before. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath and felt the water close in around her head.

At that moment, she felt a hand lift her head out of the water. A man appeared behind her. He told her his name was Eric and he was there to help her. He told her to relax, they would be okay and he wouldn’t leave her. She felt her spirit shift from despair to peace.

Fire Captain Eric Ayers had been conducting routine business for the Lassen-Modoc-Plumas Unit of CAL FIRE in Susanville at the time of the incident. At 8:56 a.m. he heard an emergency dispatch come across the radio of his utility vehicle. The call was for a single vehicle into the river two blocks away. He had no rescue equipment and no floatation device, yet the thought of not responding did not cross his mind. He notified the Emergency Command Center that he was heading to the call, and within one minute he was on scene.

Before any other emergency response resources arrived, Eric slid down the bank and dove into the freezing water. He swam to the vehicle and entered through a rear door. Once inside, he crawled to the driver’s seat, reached out and held Bonnie’s head out of the water. He wondered if he would be able to



Bonnie Hull posing with her rescuer Eric Ayers

get her out. He wondered if he would be able to save her life or if he would have to watch her die because time was running out. And then he remembered the knife he had in his pocket. He told Bonnie he was going to shift hands: he would hold her head out of the water with his left hand so he could reach for the knife with his right. He reassured her they were going to be okay. Eric cut her seat belt free and helped her into the back seat and out the back door. He helped her across the icy river, up the muddy bank and into the waiting ambulance where they were both treated for mild hypothermia.

Eric received the Veteran’s Firefighter Award in Susanville on November 19, 2008, for his bravery, and he was presented with the Governor’s Gold Medal of Valor Award in Sacramento on December 9, 2008. Though Eric is one to downplay his actions, he was a hero that frozen day in December. He went above and beyond what was expected of him to help someone in need, risking his own life in the process. He was not equipped for this type of call. He had no protection from the near freezing water. He had no ropes or flotation devices, and being first on scene, had no assistance from other responders. His first thought was to save a life. Without his quick actions, Bonnie Hull would likely have drowned. In the eyes of the CAL FIRE Lassen-Modoc-Plumas Unit and the eyes of Bonnie Hull, that makes Eric Ayers a hero.

IN HONOR AND RECOGNITION
OF ALL WILDLAND FIREFIGHTERS
ACROSS THIS GREAT NATION
DUTY - RESPECT - INTEGRITY

Fallen Heroes

By Suzanne Brady, fire prevention specialist, Siskiyou Unit

CHIEF BRIAN ZOLLNER
CAL FIRE
APR. 12, 2007

ENGINE 57
MARK "LOTZI" LOUTZENHISER
JESS McLEAN
JASON McKAY
PABLO CERDA
DANIEL HOOVER-PAJERA
ESPERANZA FIRE
SAN BERNARDINO NF CA
OCT. 26, 2006

EVA SCHICKE
COLUMBIE FIRE
STANISLAUS NF, CA
SEPT. 12, 2004

CHRIS M. KANTON
CDF/RIVERSIDE CO. FIRE DEPT. CA
AUG. 6, 2005
CHRIS WAS EXACTLY WHERE HE
WANTED TO BE, IN AN ENGINE WITH
HIS COLLEAGUES, GOING TO HELP
FOLKS WHO NEEDED HIM.

MATTHEW WILL
COLORADO FIRE
MONTEREY COUNTY, CA
OCT. 9, 2007
NEVER FORGET
MATT WILL

GEORGE "SANDY" WILLETT
BATTALION CHIEF
ROBERT PAUL STONE
PILOT
JAGUAR FIRE CA
SEPT. 6, 2006

♡
Matt-a-Rack
We love & miss
you deeply!
Hugs & Kisses
always
Dad, Mom, B

Big Daddy
I ♡ You!
Happy Anniversary
May 17, 1997
Love Diana
& Dennise

On May 15, 2008, Engine 2660 from the Siskiyou Unit headed to the 4th Annual Wildland Firefighter Foundation, Family Fire Day at the Fallen Firefighters Foundation in Boise, Idaho. Director Ruben Grijalva personally requested that a CAL FIRE engine attend, which was not only an honor for the chosen firefighters to attend this event, but a privilege. "Having the honor of representing our department at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) was an experience of a life time," said Siskiyou Unit Fire Captain Monty Messenger.

on this day to celebrate life; to honor, respect and show their love for those family members who perished and all others who lost their lives doing what they most loved to do.

This was a weekend for the families. Saturday was a day that families watched wildland demonstrations at Lucky Peak Nursery including smoke jumpers, a helicopter demo and rappellers who scaled sheer walls. Engineers were on hand to talk about their jobs. Family members were escorted by the CAL FIRE



Chris Kanton's mom and sister



Matthew Will's Family



Dee Dee and Elsie Will



Future CAL FIRE Pilot

The concept for the Wildland Firefighter Foundation came about following the 1994 Storm King tragedy in Colorado where 14 firefighters died. Dedicated volunteers came together to create the foundation and develop a national monument to honor fallen wildland firefighters.

Honor Guard, USFS, BLM, and NPS, to the National Interagency Fire Center where a special ceremony was held for all heroes who have passed on. It was a day filled with stories, laughter and tears.

The Foundation not only maintains the Wildland Firefighters National Monument located at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho, but also provides emergency support services to the families of firefighters seriously injured or killed in the line of duty.

Each family was presented with one white dove. A dove symbolizes peace and endearment. With every dove there was a message released for their loved one. "Watching a little boy whisper to a dove, 'I miss you daddy,' and see tears running down his cheeks will be a moment I will never forget," said Captain Ivan Krafner. Stories and memories are all some people have to hold on to.



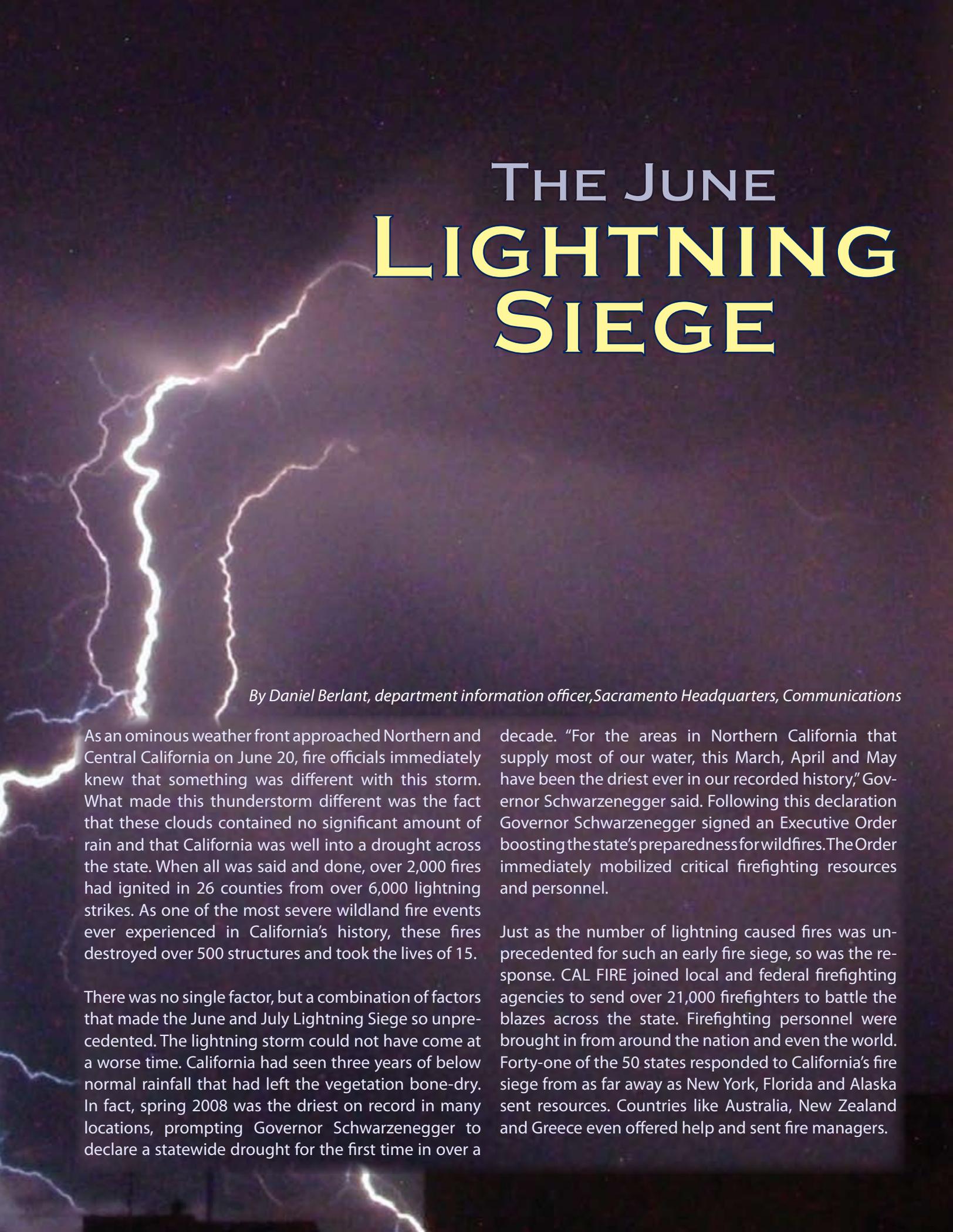
Chris Johnson's widow and son

The Foundation is there to help the families, and even firefighters themselves, solve the logistical problems they face. The organization arranges transportation, lodging, provides living expenses and helps out with bills that need to be paid following a tragedy. The most important role they offer is a listening ear and a heart filled with love. They make families feel they are important and not forgotten today or any day no matter when they lost their loved one. Families came from all over the country

The Wildland Firefighting Foundation is built on amazing people. They can't do all this hard work themselves. They need volunteers like you and me to reach out and become a resource for families to rely upon. Get your local communities involved. Contact the Wildland Firefighting Foundation at www.wffoundation.org. If you would like to donate, please donate to the CDF-Firefighters Benevolent Foundation. For more information visit www.cdf-firefighters.org. And remember, every little bit helps.



Rob Stone's Family



THE JUNE LIGHTNING SIEGE

By Daniel Berlant, department information officer, Sacramento Headquarters, Communications

As an ominous weather front approached Northern and Central California on June 20, fire officials immediately knew that something was different with this storm. What made this thunderstorm different was the fact that these clouds contained no significant amount of rain and that California was well into a drought across the state. When all was said and done, over 2,000 fires had ignited in 26 counties from over 6,000 lightning strikes. As one of the most severe wildland fire events ever experienced in California's history, these fires destroyed over 500 structures and took the lives of 15.

There was no single factor, but a combination of factors that made the June and July Lightning Siege so unprecedented. The lightning storm could not have come at a worse time. California had seen three years of below normal rainfall that had left the vegetation bone-dry. In fact, spring 2008 was the driest on record in many locations, prompting Governor Schwarzenegger to declare a statewide drought for the first time in over a

decade. "For the areas in Northern California that supply most of our water, this March, April and May have been the driest ever in our recorded history," Governor Schwarzenegger said. Following this declaration Governor Schwarzenegger signed an Executive Order boosting the state's preparedness for wildfires. The Order immediately mobilized critical firefighting resources and personnel.

Just as the number of lightning caused fires was unprecedented for such an early fire siege, so was the response. CAL FIRE joined local and federal firefighting agencies to send over 21,000 firefighters to battle the blazes across the state. Firefighting personnel were brought in from around the nation and even the world. Forty-one of the 50 states responded to California's fire siege from as far away as New York, Florida and Alaska sent resources. Countries like Australia, New Zealand and Greece even offered help and sent fire managers.



The last CAL FIRE lightning siege fire was finally contained on July 29. Over the next few months, the state's fire activity was relatively normal especially in Southern California. In late November, a number of wildfires sparked in Southern California in Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, and Orange Counties. These three fires were extremely destructive destroying hundreds of homes and structures. These three fires all started within a few days of each other and each was a high profile incident. Either due to location, destruction or complexity, these three fires received a lot of attention. The Tea Fire in Santa Barbara burned throughout the upscale communities of Montecito and Santa Barbara. The Sayre Fire destroyed hundreds of homes and structures throughout northern Los Angeles County. Finally, the Freeway Complex burned over 30,000 acres across four counties.



Lightning Siege Statistics	
2,096 Fires	1.2 million Acres
Statistics at the Peak (7/13/2008)	
21,244 Personnel	489 Hand Crews
1,520 Engines	391 Water Tenders
231 Dozers	121 Helicopters



CALLING IN THE GUARD

MAFFS

Modular Airborn Fire Fighting System

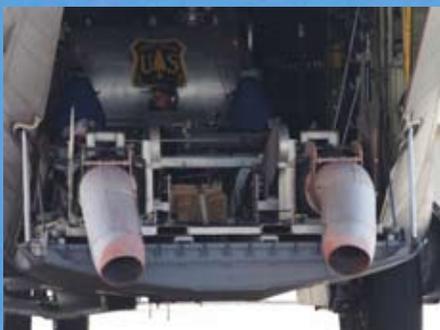
By Daniel Berlant, department information officer, Sacramento HQ, Communications

On January 30, CAL FIRE joined officials from the California National Guard and the US Forest Service to unveil a newly redesigned firefighting system that can augment CAL FIRE's own fleet of over 50 firefighting aircraft to help California battle major wildfires. The Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System, or MAFFS, is a portable fire retardant system that is mounted inside of a military C-130 transport plane converting it into a large air tanker.

The MAFFS systems have been around for over 30 years, but this newly redesigned system is more effective in its use and

dispersion of fire retardant. Each unit can carry 3,000 gallons of fire retardant, which can weigh up to 28,000 pounds. The MAFFS can drop their load at a variable rate that can cover an area 60 feet wide and one-quarter of a mile long.

"We pride ourselves on aggressive initial attack at stopping 95 percent of the fires in the state at less than 10 acres," said Chief Del Walters, director of CAL FIRE. "But unfortunately there is that other 5 percent. At times like that we have to rely on such tools as the MAFFS to augment our own fleet"



A look at the old MAFFS



The Redesigned MAFFS II







Saving Li'l Smokey

By: Adam Deem, forester, Northern Region Office

When it comes to wildlife and wildfire it's not like the movies: Sadly, Bambi usually dies.

Fire confuses animals' sense of direction and panic can cause an animal to rush towards, not away, from danger. They don't have the maps or aerial observers to point the way to safety. Nature, as they say, takes its course.

So it was for a 6 month old American black bear cub in the aftermath of the Moon Fire in Shasta County this past summer. The underweight runt wandered in a daze badly dehydrated with third degree burns to all four paws, abandoned by a mother who was unable to tend to his wounds. It was a sad sight, and one that was playing itself out all over our state that summer.

When I first saw the cub and before I observed his injuries, my first thought was to take a few pictures before the mom showed up to rush him to safety. It was only after I got a little closer in my pickup that I noticed he was injured. Inching closer in my truck caused him to clumsily scramble off the road and up into a small tree. When he picked his feet up I could see the raw flesh and

melted paws, it was a miracle he could walk at all.

I can't recall how many seconds it took me to decide that I needed to help him somehow. Despite knowing that this was happening everywhere, I just could not leave that little guy out there to die alone.

Plan A was to call in an expert from the Department of Fish and Game to catch him. This was a sound plan, as long as the bear stayed up in the tree. He didn't, and as he scrambled down the tree and downhill away from me I knew that I had to act quickly or he would be gone forever.

So how do you capture a baby bear? Throwing cookies after him from the safety of the truck as he runs downhill has no effect; he probably thought I was trying to attack him. Imitating the cries of another baby bear worked slightly better, and he actually climbed back towards me several times before deciding that I was no bear. I finally realized I would have to catch him myself. I took a deep breath and stepped out of the vehicle...

Capturing him was easier than I expected it would be. As he ran straight downhill, I took a wide circle through the burned Manzanita, scratching myself as I went. About 100 feet below the road he saw another tree and tried desperately to climb away from me. Once he got about shoulder height, I had to make a quick grab. I took him by the scruff of the neck and pulled him towards me, just like you would pick up a kitten. Well, he was no kitten. At just under 9 pounds he became all claws and teeth, making every effort to bite me and squirm out of my hands. I had no idea such a tiny bear could have so much strength,





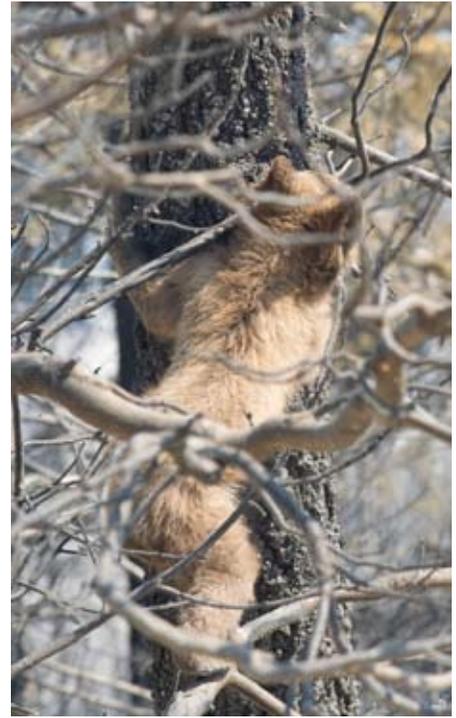
out how to get him off the line and back to base, which was over an hour and a half away.

I would not recommend backing up a vehicle while holding a wild bear under your arm, it severely complicates the process. Through a series of interesting and harrowing experiences, and with the help of others, we were able to get back to camp. Now wrapped in a towel, provided by a water tender driver, he had calmed down considerably and instead of trying to bite me, he was licking my hands where they had been scratched by the brush. Back at the medical unit, a DMAT team led by CAL FIRE captain Kevin Powell quickly rushed to the aid of the little bear. Public Information Officer Doug Lannon called his vet in Southern California and received recommendations for treating a dehydrated bear with burns, and I held him down as the treatments were administered in short order. It was exactly what you would expect from a group of seasoned professionals.

considering how badly he was injured. We worked our way back up to the truck and I got him in the cab, tucked under my arm. Now I called base camp and let them in on the whole situation. We had previously only discussed sending a game warden to help me out. Now I had the bear in hand and we needed to get him where he could be treated.

It was eventually decided that we would take him to base camp where I could hand off this little bear to a Fish and Game Warden. Until then, I had to figure

A short time later a game warden came and we put the little bear into a cat carrier box. I figured that I would probably never see him again. It seemed doubtful at the time, considering how bad he was



injured. Earlier, someone had asked me if I had thought up a name. Several ideas came to mind, but I finally settled on Li'l Smokey, mostly because he looked like a little sausage once we had him wrapped up in a towel. I said goodbye to Li'l Smokey and thought that it would be the last I would hear about that injured little bear. Boy was I wrong.

“I had no idea such a tiny bear could have so much strength, considering how badly he was injured.”

below: photographs courtesy of Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care



THE BANNER BASKET



By Leah Sandberg, fire prevention specialist, Lassen-Modoc Unit

We take family very seriously at the Lassen-Modoc Unit. The first thing you will notice when you visit our headquarters office in Susanville, is the wall of baby pictures. Photos of children, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews fill up three huge bulletin boards. Everyone knows when you take a new picture a copy goes to Shirley Barber, the unit receptionist. Shirley can always find space for one more photo on the wall. We are certainly reminded each time we visit headquarters of how blessed we are.

That's why the idea of giving a basket of items to the first baby born each year at Banner Hospital in Lassen County had

such appeal. It was an opportunity to show how thankful we felt by giving to someone else. We hoped, if the family was willing, we would add one more little addition to our family bulletin board: our "Fire Prevention Baby" for 2009.

On November 18, 2008, the call went out for donations for our "Banner Basket." Baby items started showing up left and right: diapers, t-shirts, blankets, baby monitors, everything needed to welcome a new baby into the family. By December 19 the first box purchased to hold the items had to be returned for a larger one. On December 30, the items were placed into the box and taken to

the hospital. The hospital staff was surprised at the size of the box and the array of items donated.

On January 2, 2009, our Fire Prevention Baby, Aaron Manuel Velasco, arrived weighing six pounds, seven ounces and measuring 20 inches long. His mom and dad, Manuel and Maria Velasco, were overjoyed by the donations and overwhelmed with delight by the arrival of their first child. The Lassen-Modoc Unit was pleased to be able to give them a good start as a family and to wish them a fire safe future.

Making A Difference for MDA

By Scott McLean, fire captain, Butte Unit

Every year hundreds of thousands of Americans are diagnosed with various forms of Muscular Dystrophy and Lou Gehrig's disease. To help raise money for research and assistance, CAL FIRE has teamed up with the Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA).

The fire service as a whole has long been a supporter of MDA with the "Fill the Boot" campaign. In fact, in the department's first year of participating, CAL FIRE firefighters raised over \$140,000. In 2008 half of the department's 21 units participated raising enough money to put the department third in the state and 17th in the nation for funds raised. With CAL FIRE being the 3rd largest fire department in the United States, the employee's overwhelming support to the MDA cause has been remarkable.

The history of fire department's role in MDA fundraising began in 1952 when the father of a child diagnosed with a neuro-muscular disease, in desperation, sought out the aid of George Graney, IAFF (International Association of Fire Fighters) Local 718 member and the help of Boston Fire Engine Company 1. Immediately, twenty firefighters set out to conduct a door-to-door canister drive that raised \$5,000 to help with the child's medical expenses.

In August of 1954, Graney spoke at IAFF's annual convention and gained unanimous approval of a proclamation that MDA be established as the association's "charity of choice." This marked the beginning of a formal and long-standing bond between the IAFF and MDA.

Since then, firefighters have taken this vision and made it their mission, raising funds in a myriad of ways: placing collec-

tion jars in stores and restaurants, sponsoring charity softball games, running auctions and their signature fund-raising activity, the MDA "Fill the Boot" drive.

The IAFF has emerged as the single largest sponsor of MDA, contributing nearly \$300 million since 1954. This year's 43rd Annual Jerry Lewis Labor Day Telethon netted over \$65 million through various fundraisers throughout the nation and of that amount, over \$27 million was raised by the IAFF alone.

The funds raised from MDA fundraising have provided scientific researchers the opportunity to continue working diligently toward dramatic breakthroughs. Unfortunately, there are many more that are needed. A recent breakthrough has given life to individuals who suffer with Pompe's disease which strikes mostly very young children who would rarely see their first birthday. But because of this scientific breakthrough these children will now live well into adulthood. You can only imagine the potential use of this kind of research for other forms of neuro-muscular diseases.

To get involved and to support the "Fill the Boot" challenge, all one needs is a boot and a strong willingness to spend a couple of hours making a difference. As plans for the 2009 fundraising efforts are underway, CAL FIRE's MDA leadership continue to urge employees and members of the public to remember how their support and donation can truly help those affected by muscular dystrophy.

For more information on how you can volunteer or help. Contact the CAL FIRE / MDA State Coordinator Scott McLean at mclean42@comcast.net.



Del Walters, Director of CAL FIRE

Del Walters was appointed as Director of CAL FIRE on February 11, 2009.

When Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed Del Walters as director of CAL FIRE, his selection was historic. Walters is only the second director to have ever worked through the ranks of CAL FIRE starting as a seasonal firefighter.

"With more than 30 years of service at CAL FIRE, Del Walters is the perfect person to head our state's firefighting efforts," said Governor Schwarzenegger. "Playing a key role in combating the 2007 and 2008 firestorms, he has the experience and leadership capabilities to implement the highest standards of fire prevention and fire fighting while ensuring all Californians are protected."

Walters' promotion to the department's highest rank comes after more than 30 years since beginning his career with CAL FIRE as a firefighter I stationed at King City in the San Benito-Monterey Unit.

Walters has served as the executive officer for CAL FIRE since 2008. Prior to promoting to executive officer, he was the assistant region chief then staff chief of operations for the Northern Region.

Prior to that, Walters was the deputy chief for the Shasta-Trinity Unit. He previously worked in the Sonoma-Lake-Napa Unit as the assistant chief of administration, battalion chief, vegetation management program coordinator forester I and fire captain. He has also served as a fire captain, fire apparatus engineer and firefighter in the San Benito-Monterey

Unit. Walters has been a California State Peace Officer since 1986.

After starting his education at Hartnell University in Salinas, Walters received his Bachelor of Science degree in forest resource management from Humboldt State University.

As the first month passes on his directorship, Walters plans to keep the department moving forward in the same positive direction. "I do not intend to make dramatic changes in the direction we have benefited from during Chief Grijalva's tenure," said Walters.

As Walters' reflects on his career with CAL FIRE he has a number of accomplishments. After living in Santa Rosa for 18 years, Walters has many stories that have come out of his time in Sonoma County. In a county that has a long history dealing with major flooding issues, Chief Walters lead a small team of Emergency personnel who created the Lower Russian River Flood Response Plan with the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office and several Fire Protection Districts. The plan addressed ways to help minimize the impact from flooding and centered on how public safety departments would respond. The plan remains in use today in the areas along the river that are prone to severe flooding.

When it comes to managing major incident, Chief Walters has had his share of experiences. His leadership in the recent

fire sieges has come from his time as Incident Commander of CAL FIRE Incident Command Team #3. Walters had the opportunity to showcase the department's expertise in incident management and dealing with complex incidents when his team was called upon to help manage the Exotic Newcastle Disease. "Had you told me earlier in my career that I'd be the incident commander on a team responsible for chicken disease fighting, I might have thought you were joking," Walters added with a laugh.

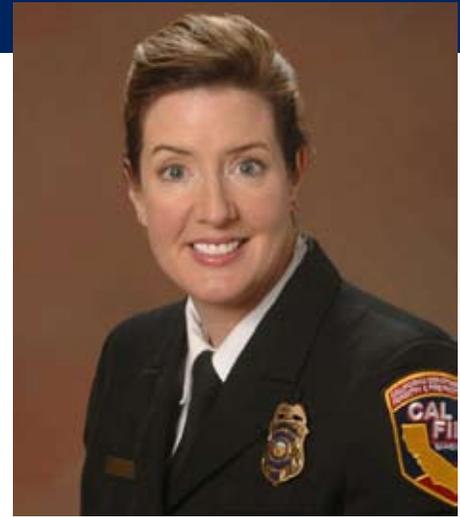
Though dedicated to his job and the department, Walters enjoys spending quality time with his family. Walters lives in Redding with his wife of over 30 years, Janet. The pair has two children; a son David, 26, and daughter Shannon, 24, both of whom live in Santa Rosa. When Walters is not at work he enjoys the outdoors, especially hunting pheasants with his dog, Otter.

"I'm optimistic about the direction CAL FIRE is headed," said Walters. "Throughout my career I have heard the sentiment that it would be great to have a director that worked their way through the ranks... someone who knew the department. I can't claim to have done it all, but this is my opportunity to use my knowledge and skills to build on the future of this department. I look forward to sharing the experience with the department."



Secretary for Natural Resources, Mike Chrisman swears in Chief Del Walters as CAL FIRE's new Director.

Janet Upton, Deputy Director of Communications



Janet Upton was appointed as deputy director of communications on July 1, 2008. The Communiqué caught up with Upton to learn more about her.

Tell us about your career with CAL FIRE:

When I was in college I had every intention of becoming a school teacher like my parents. I was taking an EMT class where I was recruited by a then Sonoma Unit CDF captain. I began my fire service career as a firefighter I at the Hilton Fire Station in 1986.

I thought CAL FIRE would be a great job to help me pay for college. After I did my student teaching and earned my degree, I enjoyed working for CAL FIRE so much that I chose it as my career instead of becoming a school teacher.

A few of my favorite assignments included being a firefighter, rescue diver, working in the command center and prevention bureau and being on Command Team #5, which I especially enjoyed. The varied experiences have been helpful in my role as PIO and I have had the good fortune to work for some of the greatest leaders in our department along the way.

Which of your accomplishments are you most proud of?

I think being able to help people in their time of need is what keeps a lot of us in this field motivated so I am really proud to be part of this noble profession.

Another high point in my career has been the Fire PALS (Fire Prevention and Life Safety) program we were able to start in the Butte Unit. The group consists of firefighters, prevention and personnel specialists, engineers, captains, VIP's and a battalion chief.

Fire PALS teaches children fire and life safety messages using music, comedy and characterization. You would be amazed at the talent in our department! One example of the assembly venue program is our "American Safety Idol" skit that parodies the popular television show and highlights helmet safety, match and lighter safety, even defensible space.

The Fire PALS program has been attributed for saving at least three children's lives that we know of and it's extremely rewarding to know our efforts have resulted in some happy endings.

What do you envision for the future of CAL FIRE public information?

I think we need to reach out to our customers via what was once considered non-traditional media that is now mainstream. For example, we recently started a department You Tube site called "CAL FIRE TV" where we highlight various programs by posting what are

essentially our own news stories. We plan on starting official department "My Space" and "Facebook" sites and are pursuing other methods of information dissemination like Twitter and a CAL FIRE blog.

I am also working on the implementation of PIO "quick attack" teams whose mission is to respond to large, complex incidents in support of the Unit/Incident PIO during the ramp up phase of emergencies. This is typically when many "figurative fires" can conflagrate into negative media stories and negative public perception simply due to a lack of PIO's to address them. This concept was tested on the "Tea" and "Freeway" fires this past fall with great success.

What would you like to accomplish during your time as Deputy Director?

I would like to see the dedicated Unit PIO positions become more widely implemented. I know this comes at a cost but the benefit of having positions like this, with the right people in them, is immeasurable in terms of media and public relations. I strongly believe that the payoff of having the continuity and established relationships that the dedicated PIO positions foster far outweighs the investment, though it's admittedly difficult to quantify in terms of dollars.

Meet CAL FIRE's New Chiefs...

Janet Upton continued...

In the realm of education, I'd like to see CAL FIRE have its own mascot. I know Smokey Bear is an icon but his message is one note and I believe our prevention messages should reflect fire and life safety messages that can help prevent all types of emergencies and tragedies we see across the state on a daily basis. We are all-risk and our safety messages should be, too.

This all being said, at the end of the day I would like the Sacramento Public Information and Education program to be known for exceptional internal customer service and support of the field. We have a great staff and the feedback we've had so far indicates we are succeeding.

Tell us about your family.

My husband, Scott, is an air tactical group supervisor at the Chico Air Attack base and we have three kids; Scotty, Matt and Cristina. At one point during the lightning fires in Butte last June, I was the PIO, Scott was the helicopter coordinator, Scotty was working as a firefighter on an engine, his wife, Dani, was working in the phone center, Matt was loading tankers and Cristina was working as a call taker. I think the Upton's needed their own T-card rack in the Plans section!

Any concluding comments?

Just that it was quite a ride the first few months and I am really enjoying the challenges of the job. After my appointment was announced, I received many messages from people in our department and they were very inspiring. The support of the field means the world to me and I am striving to live up to everyone's expectations, including my own!

It really is an honor to have been appointed by Governor Schwarzenegger to a department with such a noble mission of protecting the people, property and resources of California. CAL FIRE is a world class organization we should all be proud of.

Dale Hutchinson, Unit Chief, Madera-Mariposa-Merced Unit

By Julie Hutchinson, fire captain, Riverside Unit

On February 2, 2009, Dale Hutchinson was appointed unit chief of the Madera-Mariposa-Merced Unit. Chief Hutchinson has worked in the fire service for 28 years, beginning his career in 1980 while still in high school, as a volunteer firefighter at the Desert Hot Springs Station in Riverside County. His original reason for joining the volunteer company was to help the community. It did not take long for him realize that being a firefighter would be his lifelong career.

In 1983, he accepted a permanent position as a dispatcher clerk in Perris followed by a limited-term fire apparatus engineer job in the San Mateo-Santa Cruz Unit in 1986.

Then in early 1990, Chief Hutchinson moved back to Riverside and promoted through the ranks. His positions included working as an engine and truck captain, deputy fire marshal, fire investigator, field battalion chief, Pre-Fire battalion chief and division chief at Oak Glen Camp.

Since 2006, Chief Hutchinson has been the Deputy Chief of Western Operations, Pre-Fire Management, and the Fleet in the Riverside Unit.

He has developed a fair and consistent management style and has extensive experience dealing with personnel issues, contracts/cooperative agreements, major incident management, complex interagency relationships, and is prepared to meet the challenges ahead.

Chief Hutchinson has been involved with Incident Command Teams since 2001 working his way to Incident Commander on Team #7.

Chief Hutchinson will be commuting from Riverside County until his son Andrew graduates from high school in mid-June. The family will then look at options for potentially relocating. Chief Hutchinson has been married for twenty years to his wife Julie who is a Fire Captain in the Public Affairs Bureau in



the Riverside Unit. His daughter Kathryn is in Kindergarten and reminds him constantly who the boss is!

"I look forward to working to develop and continue strong interagency cooperation and communication to provide the best service possible to the people we serve," said Chief Hutchinson.

Loren Snell, Staff Chief, Cooperative Fire Protection Program, Sacramento Headquarters

By Lyndee Port, communications analyst, Sacramento Headquarters

On July 1, 2008, Loren Snell was promoted to the position of staff chief of the Cooperative Fire Protection Program at Sacramento Headquarters.

Chief Snell began his career with CAL FIRE in 1972 as a seasonal firefighter in the Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit. He accepted a permanent position in the Siskiyou Unit as a fire apparatus engineer in 1977 and five years later promoted to fire captain in Siskiyou. Chief Snell then transferred to the Academy as an instructor, later promoting to Battalion Chief of the Sacramento Command Center.

In 1992, Snell transferred to the Nevada-Yuba-Placer Unit as the training and safety bureau chief and in 1997 promoted to division chief of Placer County Operations. In 2006, Snell con-

sidered retiring and took nine months off, but was unable to stay away for long and returned in 2007 to Sacramento Headquarters as the deputy chief of Command and Control.

When asked what his favorite time with CAL FIRE has been, Snell responded, "As I reflect back over the years, probably the time on the 'red sled' (fire engine) was the best of times. You are out there physically, mentally engaged on an incident; living it; eating it; bringing it back in your lungs." Though no longer on the 'red sled', Chief Snell's new role is vital to the department's relationships with local, state and federal agencies.

Chief Snell lives near Folsom Lake State Park and likes to make use of all the park's trails while running or riding his



bike. That is of course when he isn't spoiling his new grandson — Aiden.

Brenda Seabert, Staff Chief of Fire Protection Operations, Sacramento Headquarters

By Lyndee Port, communications analyst, Sacramento Headquarters

On December 2, 2008, Brenda Seabert was appointed staff chief of Fire Protection Operations at Sacramento Headquarters. She is responsible for organizing and coordinating the state-wide fire protection programs, including the Department's emergency command and control system, telecommunications and various automation programs.

Chief Seabert started her career with CAL FIRE in 1980 as a seasonal firefighter in the Riverside Unit. In 1983, she spent the summer as a limited term engineer in the Mendocino Unit, before transferring back to the Riverside Unit and promoting to engineer, captain then to battalion chief. In Riverside, Chief Seabert worked on a Helitack Crew for five years. In 1987, when she promoted to a fire captain, Seabert became the first public affairs captain in the Riverside

Unit. "It was pretty fun to develop that program," said Seabert.

From there, Chief Seabert promoted to assistant chief in South Ops. She later returned to the Riverside Unit as the administrative division chief for a couple of years, before returning to the field as the division chief of Bautista Conservation Camp. Chief Seabert had been looking to come to Northern California, so she transferred to the Sonoma-Lake-Napa Unit as the administrative officer where she worked for approximately two years.

"I've worked in the administrative side of things for about the last five years so getting back to the operational side is really enjoyable for me because that's my true love of the department."



Chief Seabert has a fondness for horses and owns four of them. Painting is a hobby of hers and plans to focus a lot more on her art when she retires.

Kudos

A look at some of the letters and cards received in recognition of the work done by CAL FIRE's employees.

Hello,

My name is Greg Pero and I am writing to you with regards to the events and actions I witnessed on Saturday, Nov. 15th 2008 during the Corona-Anaheim Hills-Yorba Linda fire.

My wife Darlene and I live at 8710 E. Foxhollow Drive, Anaheim Hills. Our home sits at the end of a cul-de-sac carved into the side of a hill that overlooks the 91 freeway just west of the 241 interchange. Above our house to our immediate west is Morning Star Drive and approximately one half mile to the northwest is the Cascade Apartment complex.

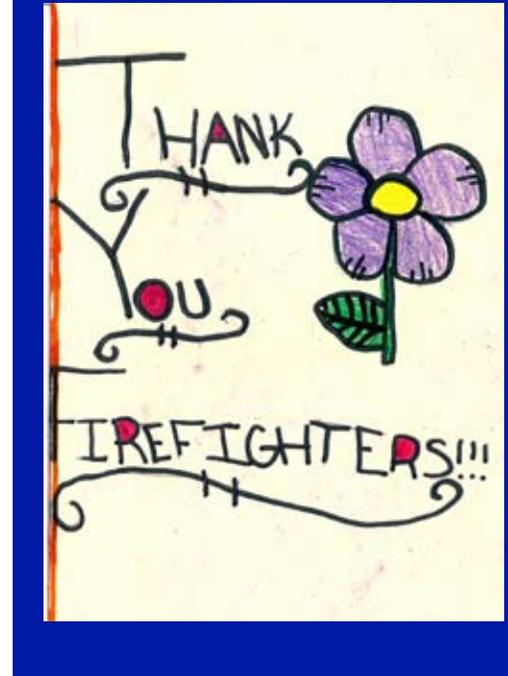
Late Saturday afternoon on Nov. 15th, the fire was in full force the devastation had already occurred at the Cascade Apartment complex and houses on Morning Star Drive were under siege. My worst fears were confirmed when flames could clearly be seen headed in our direction with nothing but dry brush in between.

Initially the flames marched up to the backyard of a house on Morning Star Drive that overlooks our street. My wife happened to be out of town on a busi-

ness trip and so I was on the phone with her giving her the gut-wrenching news that one of our neighbors houses was about to go up in flames. Seconds later through the thick smoke I saw two helicopters appear just above the house's roof line and drop water directly on the fire stopping it dead in its tracks. I cannot express the raw emotion I felt as I screamed into the phone "I can't believe it ... they saved that house!"

A little while later the emotions turned as embers reignited on the hillside and now the fire was raging about 150 yards from our street headed in our direction. The only thing stopping it now were a few garden hoses as none of the fire trucks had made it to our street.

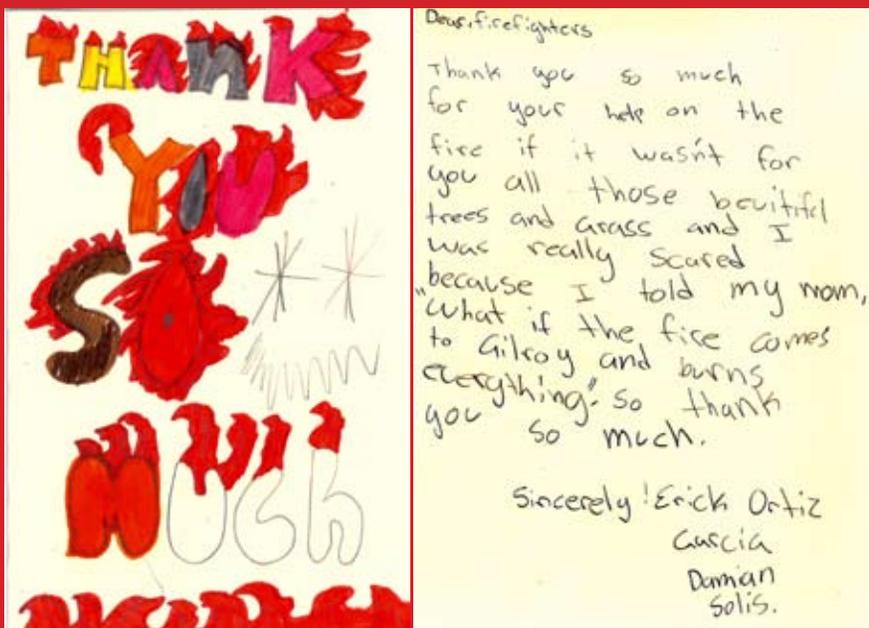
Darlene was frantically making her way to the airport to come home and making arrangements with the airport shuttle to drop her off when she called to find out where. I remember telling her I had no idea and the reality of the moment crystallized for both of us. She asked if our home was going to survive and I replied that at the moment it was 50-50.



By this time the Anaheim PD was ordering an evacuation, we have 5 pets (2 dogs and 3 cats) and so I had hung up with Darlene to get them into the car. By this time the hillside to our northwest was entirely in flames, after securing all 5 pets I went to take one last look when it seemed out of nowhere two teams of two helicopters came in at almost roof top level and squashed the fire. Two of them were easily identifiable as helicopters #404 and #406. The emotion of the moment got the best of me when I quickly phoned Darlene back to tell her "Honey I think they just saved our home". Within a short walking distance from our home 31 houses were destroyed and 44 damaged, in addition to, the Cascade Apartment Complex. Looking back on it a few days later, it is without doubt that had it not been for the combined efforts of these helicopter crews and their spotters, our street would have suffered a similar fate as others that were devastated, instead not one house on our street suffered damage.

In this day and age of digital media, sound bites, video clips it is easy to be desensitized to traumatic events such as Saturday Nov. 15th, however to have your home hanging in the balance and to personally witness acts of professionalism, skill and sheer courage by others to save your home is truly one of the most emotional events one can experience and one that I will never forget.

Both Darlene and I are fully aware and appreciative of the efforts that all of the

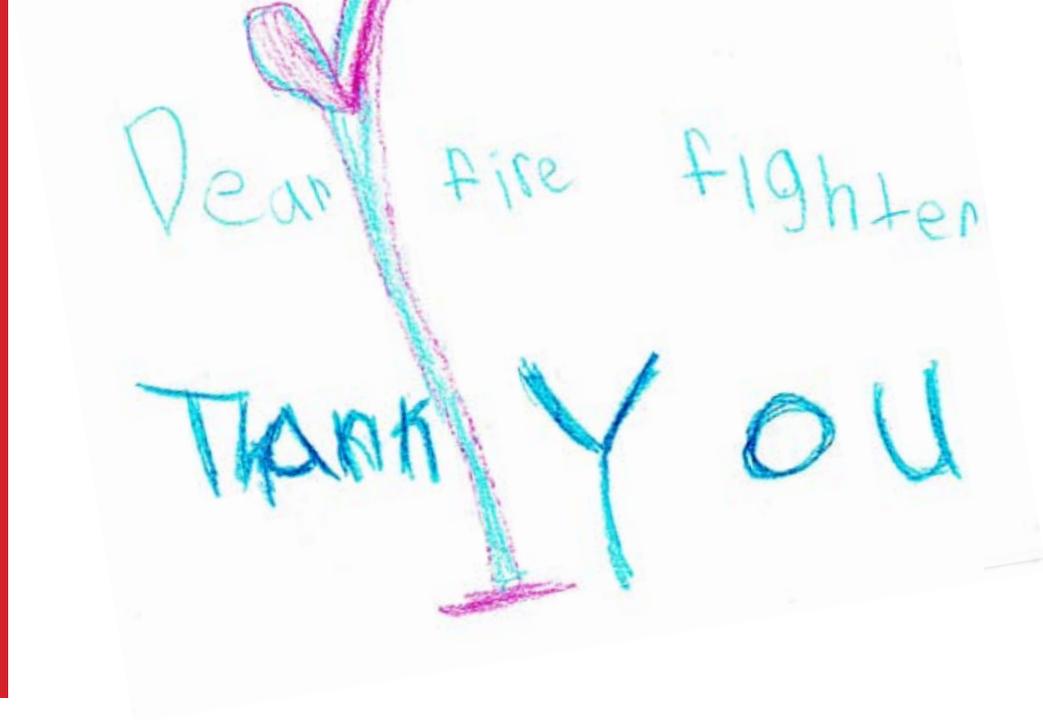


Dear firefighters
Thank you so much for your help on the fire if it wasn't for you all those beautiful trees and grass and I was really scared because I told my mom, "what if the fire comes everything" so thank you so much.
Sincerely! Erick Ortiz
Garcia
Damian Solis.

Hi,

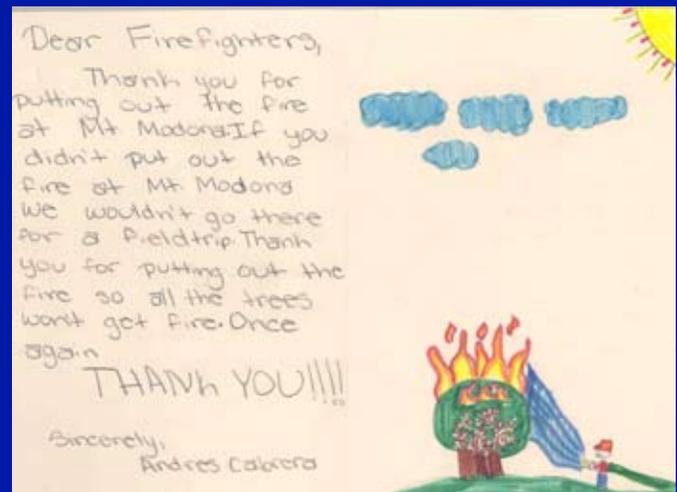
I just wanted to let you know that I appreciate having access to information about the recent fires. I particularly like the maps. It's nice to be able to glean information, when a fire is near family and friends. May God bless you all for the important work that you do.

- Daryl -



men and women from the fire, police and sheriff departments put forth in emergencies such as this. We make it a point of waving or saying "thank you" to those we see in our neighborhood, but obviously that is a little more difficult to do with the flight crews. Please share with these "Heroes" our deepest gratitude and thanks! I will never forget what I witnessed on the afternoon of Saturday, Nov. 15th 2008.

Sincerely,
Greg Pero
Anaheim Hills, CA 92808





The Communiqué is published by CAL FIRE's Communications Office. Articles and photographs are always welcome.