



Memorial for Fallen Firefighters Dedicated

On Saturday, September 27, 2008, an audience of more than 800 firefighters and members of the public gathered on the grounds of the Government Center in Ventura to witness the unveiling and dedication of the Ventura County Fallen Firefighter Memorial.

Under a clear, blue sky, Honor Guard members removed a black drape to reveal the statue of a firefighter looking to the sky while cradling a baby in his arms. The statue stands on a pedestal inscribed with the names of 39 fallen firefighters. The American flag was raised behind the statue to complete the unveiling. The unveiling resulted in both tears and applause, along with universal praise for the power and dignity of the Memorial.

The dedication was the culmination of four years of work by the Ventura County Fire Chief's Association, the county's firefighter labor organizations, Rotary Clubs and members of the eight fire agencies serving the county. Together, they raised more than \$250,000 to construct the Memorial and provide for its future maintenance.

The ceremony began with the California Professional Firefighters' bagpipe and drum corps escorting the American flag to the Memorial. A choral group from Westlake High School sang the Pledge of Allegiance and, after speeches from city, county and state dignitaries, the Memorial was unveiled.

After the unveiling, the names of the 39 fallen firefighters were read, followed by the traditional Firefighter's Bell Ceremony and the ringing of the bell. The event was closed with the playing of "Taps."

After the ceremony, many of the fallen firefighters' families gathered beneath the statue to see and touch their loved one's name on the Memorial.

"This Memorial is a tribute not only to the fallen firefighters, but to the people who love and support them as well," said Fire Chief Bob Roper. "It was a tremendous outpouring of support from firefighters, families, community groups, businesses and individuals that made this possible. It's a matter of great pride to all of us in the fire service to know that the sacrifice of these firefighters will never be forgotten."





Our Mission

Anticipate and respond to the dynamic public safety needs of a diverse community.

Our Vision

Deliver the highest level of public service through a team effort.

Our Values

Trust, Honesty, Respect, Integrity, Service to Others, Teamwork, Safety, Communication, Accountability.

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<http://fire.countyofventura.org>



A Message from Chief Roper

Firefighters from the eight fire agencies serving the county – Ventura County, Oxnard, Ventura City, Federal Fire, Santa Paula, Fillmore, Cal Fire and the U.S. Forest Service – gathered at the Government Center in September to dedicate the Fallen Firefighter Memorial.

Many of the firefighters whose names are inscribed on the Memorial perished while fighting wildfires. It was a sobering reminder of the ferocious power of wildfires and why our department, which was established in 1928 to fight wildfires, is so committed to preventing them today and educating both our firefighters and the public we serve to prepare for wildfires before they occur.

For the past two years, our Wildfire Action Plan has been used to help homeowners living in the Wildland Urban Interface – the place where development meets a natural area – prepare themselves and their homes for a wildfire. Now, we've decided to expand that program, increasing its educational component and leading citizens to the point where, when faced with a wildfire, they can make an informed decision should they need to answer the question: Should I leave early, or stay and defend my property?

The importance of preparation was reinforced as Ventura County Fire Department units responded to assist other local agencies during the most recent brush fires. Our handcrews and dozer operators were critical to operations during the Sesnon Fire. County strike teams helped save homes during the Tea Fire in Montecito and they did excellent work, saving lives and property, at the Oakridge Mobile Home Park in Sylmar during the Sayre Fire.

The "Leave Early, or Stay and Defend" program, which we call LEOSAD, is a preparation and prevention strategy designed to help homeowners prepare themselves and their property in advance of a wildfire. It contains a comprehensive educational component that will help residents make what may be the most important decision they ever face; whether to evacuate early, or stay and defend their home.

You'll read more about LEOSAD in this issue of Backdraft, and you'll be hearing much more about it over the coming months. Also in this issue, you'll read about how our department responded to help hurricane victims in Louisiana and Texas, and our response to the tragic Metrolink train crash in Chatsworth.

As a department, we will continue looking for ways to improve our service and to add value to our communities through our prevention and educational activities. I invite you to visit our Web site (<http://fire.countyofventura.org>) to learn more about the Ventura County Fire Department and to stay current on our latest activities.

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Modugno Named Chaplain of the Year



FFC executive director, Ed Stauffer (left) presents the Chaplain of the Year award to Larry Modugno.

Ventura County Fire Chaplain Larry Modugno has been named Chaplain of the Year by the Federation of Fire Chaplains. The award was presented in October at the group’s annual conference and training seminar.

The award is the most prestigious honor the FFC bestows. Chaplains are nominated for the award by their peers, the Board of Directors reviews the nominations and then selects the Chaplain of the Year based on each nominee’s past and present work as a fire chaplain.

Modugno joined the FFC in 1996, and has risen to the level of Master Chaplain. He currently serves as a member of the Board of Directors and was recently elected as Secretary.

“He is one of the most caring, helpful, hardworking, dedicated chaplains that I personally know,” said FFC founder and executive director Ed Stauffer. “We look to many more years of his fellowship with the FFC and believe he is the epitome of what a chaplain should be.”

Battalion 5 Spruces Up From End to End

Station 28 and Station 56 anchor the ends of Battalion 5 and now, thanks to some construction and remodeling work, serve as attractive gateways to the county as well.

In 1931, the Ventura County Fire Department built a fire station on Market Street in Piru, making it the third station in the county fire district. About 20 years later, in 1950, the current fire station was built on Church Street. Now, the station has been completely remodeled and its re-opening was celebrated with a community open house in September.

In early December, firefighters moved into the newly built Station 56 in Malibu. It replaced the two-bedroom apartment and engine shed that firefighters had used for decades. The new station fronts on Pacific Coast Highway and features two engine bays, living quarters, a shop, exercise room and offices.

The stations in Piru and Malibu are an excellent demonstration of the department’s commitment to provide the citizens of Ventura County with well-trained, professional firefighters located in the communities they protect.

Station 28



Station 56



A Life or Death Decision

The enormous, frightening power of a wildfire has been demonstrated several times over the past couple of months. We saw the huge plumes of smoke spiraling into the sky and witnessed the ferocious energy of the fire as it swept up hillsides and down canyons, devouring everything in its path.

The Sesnon Fire near Simi Valley and Thousand Oaks, the Tea Fire in Montecito, the Sayre Fire in Sylmar and the Triangle Complex fires that started in Orange County have all served as vivid reminders of the destructive force of a wind-driven wildfire.

Firefighters understand the terrible power of a wildfire. They respect that power and study every fire to learn new ways to combat its strength. That is one of the reasons the VCFD weed abatement program is so stringent; it provides firefighters with a defensible space to get between a fire and the property they are battling to defend. It is also one of the reasons the department works so closely with the Sheriff's Department to develop evacuation plans and policies.

But as more homes are built in the Wildland Urban Interface – the zone where development meets natural areas – a disturbing trend has developed where people are reluctant to evacuate their homes, even in the face of an advancing wildfire. Studies from Australia, and experience in Ventura County, have shown that people who don't prepare their property, or who wait too long to evacuate, face a much higher risk of death and property damage in a wildfire, and also complicate the fire department's response to the emergency. But the heartfelt desire of some homeowners to stay and defend their property is also understandable.

As a result, the fire service in general, and the Ventura County Fire Department in particular, is adopting a new philosophy in how evacuations during a wildfire are addressed. It requires homeowners to first take personal responsibility for preparations in advance of the fire, and then for their actions during the fire.

This new strategy is called: Leave Early, or Stay and Defend (LEOSAD). It is an extension of the department's already successful Fire Hazard Reduction Program (weed abatement) and Wildfire Action Plan. The LEOSAD strategy is a two-part program with the goal that those people living in wildfire prone areas become a part of the solution, rather than becoming a part of the problem.

The first part of the strategy requires every property owner within the Wildland Urban Interface zone to adequately prepare their property against the threat of a wildfire, assemble emergency supplies and prepare a Wildfire Action Plan. Basic property preparation includes weed abatement, the use of fire resistant

building materials and the use of fire-safe landscaping. Many aspects of this portion of the strategy are already required or recommended. The big change in the program comes in the second phase.

After homeowners have made the necessary preparations to their property and made family disaster plans, every homeowner is being asked to carefully consider their personal answer to the question: Should I leave early, or stay and defend my property?

The Ventura County Fire Department strongly recommends that, when an evacuation order is issued, people leave early, as soon as they can, so that the streets aren't congested as firefighting equipment is moved into neighborhoods. That way, the citizens are safely out of harm's way and the fire department has the freedom to operate.

Before making the decision to stay and defend, a homeowner needs to consider whether they've taken the necessary preparatory measures to protect their home, evacuated their loved ones, educated themselves about what they may face when a wildfire approaches and put in place their own action plan. If the answer to any of these questions is "no," early evacuation is the wisest decision.

Homeowners choosing to stay and defend their property must take the additional steps necessary to not only prepare their property, but also themselves, so they can actively assist firefighters as the wildfire approaches and after it has passed. This will require some basic equipment and the physical ability to withstand high temperatures and choking smoke for long periods of time.

This is not a decision to be taken lightly, nor is it one to be made at the last moment. It comes back to a matter of personal responsibility. Anyone who makes the decision to stay and defend must thoroughly understand that they are making a decision that could cost them their lives or their property.

LEOSAD is a new concept, and much more information will be distributed in the future, but it's not too late to prepare for wildfires now. Copies of the Wildfire Action Plan are available at any county fire station, or it can be downloaded from the fire department Web site at: <http://fire.countyofventura.org>. Department representatives are also available to conduct community meetings to talk about this concept by calling 389-9746.

Prepare now and think about how you might answer the question: Should I leave early or stay and defend my property?



What You Should Know

If You Live in an Area Prone to Brush Fire:

- Your property should be well-prepared before a wildfire arrives.
- Appropriately prepared and constructed buildings offer protection during brush fires, reducing the likelihood of injury or death.
- Firefighting resources cannot always protect every property. Those planning to stay and defend their home must be prepared to be self-sufficient.
- A decision to stay and defend a well-prepared property or to leave early must be made well ahead of the arrival of a wildfire.
- In planning to leave early, you must know where you are going, how you will get there and what “trigger point” you will use to initiate your plan.
- Those who doubt their ability to cope with a wildfire should leave well before fire impacts their area.
- Evacuation at the last minute, ahead of a brush fire, is very dangerous.
- Large-scale, mass evacuations of communities require significant lead times. The safest course of action is to have a well-rehearsed plan in place to leave early or stay and defend long before the onset of a wildfire.

Stay and Defend Quiz

Are you physically fit to fight small fires in and around your home for up to 10 hours or more?

Are you and your family members mentally, physically and emotionally able to cope with the intense smoke, heat, stress and noise of a brush fire while defending your home?

Can you protect your home while also caring for members of your family, pets, etc.?

Do you have the necessary resources and equipment to effectively fight a fire?

Does your home have defensible space of at least 100 feet and is it cleared of flammable materials and vegetation?

Is your home constructed to resist fire?

If you answered “No” to any of these questions, then plan to leave early.

Swiftwater Team Deploys to Hurricanes Gustav and Ike

By Firefighter Shannon Black

At the end of August, forecasters were predicting an 18-25 foot storm surge and 6-12 inches of rain as Gustav, a Category Three hurricane, entered the Gulf of Mexico, headed towards the coast of Louisiana. In anticipation of massive flooding, officials requested mutual aid from dozens of emergency teams from across the country, including eight water rescue teams from California. The Ventura County Fire Department deployed fourteen team members to Louisiana. They faced a potential 14- to 21-day deployment and were warned they could possibly encounter alligators, poisonous snakes and blood-thirsty insects.

They departed Station 54 in Camarillo on Sunday, August 31, and arrived in Louisiana two days later. For the next 21 days, the 14 firefighters would live out of one Suburban, one van and two full-size pick-up trucks.

Upon their arrival, Hurricane Gustav had come and gone, leaving in its wake serious storm damage. The team experienced its first emergency response when it used its medical equipment to administer medication to a one-year-old boy experiencing respiratory distress. In Alexandria, La., the team helped residents recover from 3-4 feet of flood waters that had inundated their neighborhood. They moved from house to house pulling carpet, removing furniture and cutting down trees that had fallen into yards and onto homes.

Meanwhile, Hurricane Ike had grown into an enormous hurricane 600 miles across and the team was reassigned to assist in Texas. Traveling towards the Galveston area, the team began to encounter storm damage near Bayou Vista City. Buildings were torn apart, highway and business signs were scattered across the roadways and houses were still flooded with water. The team deployed an inflatable rescue boat to transport two elderly people from their home, inundated with several feet of water, to higher ground.

As they approached the Galveston area, they found boats, personal water craft, sections of houses, debris and cars littered along the highway, surrounded by tree limbs, trash and thousands of miscellaneous items. The VCFD and the other California water rescue

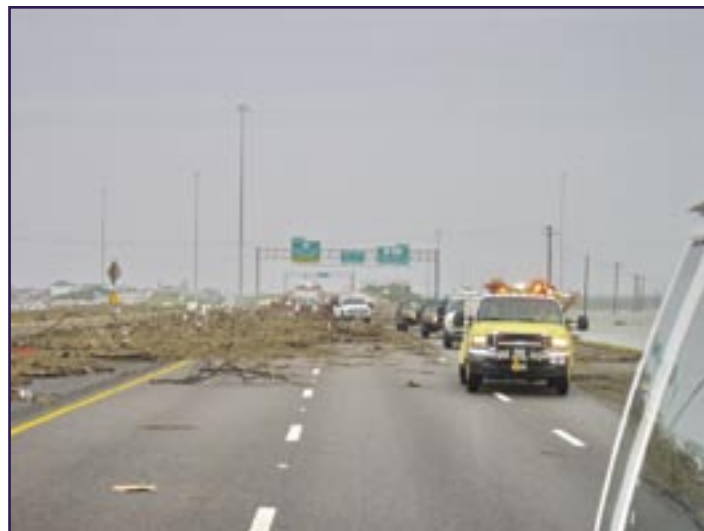
teams were dispersed into neighborhoods that had suffered major flooding, and some neighborhoods remained flooded. VCFD performed house to house searches. The VCFD water rescue resources were deployed in two inflatable rescue boats and two rescue water craft to search the coastline and beachside communities by sea. In one of these seaside communities, VCFD rescuers found two ladies stranded and requiring assistance with evacuation. In all, the VCFD water rescue teams were successful in searching and clearing miles of coastline by watercraft in addition to several beachside communities and hundreds more homes by vehicle along the peninsula southwest of Galveston.

Then, news began to emerge from the nearby peninsula of Bolivar that it had been devastated and the California water rescue teams, along with their Texas counterparts and Army National Guard personnel, were given the assignment to search the island.

The teams searched mobile home parks, residential neighborhoods, beach communities, and brand-new upscale vacation home developments. Surge levels of 10 feet and higher picked up everything in their path and scattered it across the island. Some newer beach homes on pillars withstood the surge, but surrounding these intact homes were dozens of empty foundations and hundreds of empty support pillars with the homes simply gone.

Buildings left standing were ripped apart, their interiors exposed, the building's contents spread everywhere. An unimaginable amount of debris – furniture, clothing, appliances, and personal effects littered the landscape. The task force was successful in evacuating dozens of residents, taking them to waiting Blackhawk helicopters for transport to evacuation shelters.

On the fourth day following Hurricane Ike, after three days of searching and assisting with the evacuation of hundreds of people, the teams moved north to Houston to be demobilized from the incident. Three days later, the team arrived back in Ventura County where they received a warm welcome at Fire Station 54. They were greeted by their families. Their fellow firefighters had washed the team's cars and prepared a welcome-home banquet.



VCFD Expertise Aids Rescue Effort at Metrolink Crash

On Friday, September 12, tragedy struck Ventura County when a Metrolink train filled with county residents collided with a Union Pacific locomotive head-on in Chatsworth. The news media covered the crash extensively, but couldn't adequately prepare department firefighters for the human drama they would experience when they answered a mutual aid request from the Los Angeles Fire Department for assistance with the search and rescue effort.

USAR (Urban Search and Rescue) 54, Squad 31, Squad 41 and the USAR Officer responded along with a division chief and two battalion chiefs. USAR 54 and both squads were assigned to assist LAFD USAR 88 with interior operations in the lead Metrolink car. The chief officers helped in the appropriate deployment of these resources and ensuring responder safety. The crash scene was horrific and responding Ventura County firefighters were faced with not only a difficult search and rescue mission, but also with the heart-breaking assignment of body recovery.

"This is not the type of situation any of us ever wants to encounter," said Division Chief Mike LaPlant, "but as firefighters, we know that when we treat patients with dignity and respect, it helps the families deal with their loss, and we can take some comfort in knowing we've helped those families just a little bit in a time of great tragedy."

Their job at the crash scene was demanding and arduous, both physically and emotionally, but the professionalism of the Ventura County firefighters was clearly displayed as the national media covered the story and transmitted it across the country.

Ventura County Fire Department USAR team members undergo extensive and continuous training to gain expertise in such difficult situations as building and trench collapses, confined space rescues, over-the-side recoveries and water rescues. They have demonstrated their skill at incidents such as the La Conchita landslide, the Paso Robles earthquake and many smaller incidents.

Their willingness to serve, their training and their experience all ensure that the Ventura County Fire Department USAR team will be ready the next time they are needed.



Letters

The fire department receives many letters from people whose lives we touch while carrying out our duties.

These are excerpts from some of the recent correspondence.

I just wanted to say, I had the privilege of serving a group of guys from the Ventura County Fire Department a few weeks ago at an Applebees in Alexandria, LA. I must say they were the nicest, most polite, and easiest table I have ever had to serve in all my life! The people of Ventura County are lucky to have you!

David Aycock
Via the Internet

Dear Chief Roper:

It is with a heavy heart and mixed emotions that I write to applaud your response and rescue efforts during last Friday's horrific Metrolink crash in Chatsworth. In your efforts, I witnessed compassion, determination, and unity like never before.

I have never seen such a concerted and well-organized collaboration between various local and state agencies in such a short period of time.

We made a statement that day. We said that when calamity strikes, we are ready to respond. Most of all, I want to thank you for your part in making the City of Los Angeles a better, safer place.

Thanks and God bless you.
Antonio R. Villaraigosa
Mayor

Dear Sir:

On behalf of the Board Members and Staff of the Ventura River County Water District, I would like to express our appreciation for the rapid and efficient response to the brush fire that threatened the District's site on September 5, 2008.

Due to the great response and efforts by your department the damages sustained to our site were very minimal.

It was quite impressive to be so close to a disaster and see it averted by your dedicated and competent staff. Thank you to all the responders; it is a comfort to know you are there for us!

Sincerely,
Janet Schaefer
Office Manager, VRCWD

I am a resident of Alexandria, Louisiana, for myself, my community, my neighborhood, my country, thank you for your recent assistance.

God bless and keep you all.
Robert Adams
Via the Internet

Letters

Dear Chief Roper:

I was the Strike Team Leader for OES Strike Team 6841A on the Mendocino Lightning Complex...and had the pleasure of working with OES 283 from Ventura County Fire Department, consisting of Capt. Wayne Ferber, Capt. Mike Milkovich, Eng. Jeremy Bower and Firefighter Richard Randolph.

Throughout the entire operation we consistently observed the positive attitudes and impressive work ethic of the aggressive crew from OES 282. They never questioned assignments; they all knew the job that needed to be done and the task at hand.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend this crew for the great job they did during the assignment. The County of Ventura is fortunate to have such outstanding individuals represent their Fire Department.

Sincerely,
 Jeffrey O. Lannon
 Battalion Chief
 San Miguel Consolidated Fire Protection District

The City of Goleta would like to thank all of the responding agencies to the recent "Gap" fire incident in the Goleta Valley. We are aware that for many of you this was an additional impact to your already depleted resources. However, in the finest tradition of helping one's neighbor in need, when the call went out, you responded without hesitation to the request.

The residents and businesses of Goleta are so thankful that not one home or business was destroyed in this inferno and no lives were lost due to your combined efforts in fighting this fire. It is through this coordinated effort that our local and statewide responding agencies have a chance to make a difference in the face of overwhelming odds. We salute you.

Very truly yours,
 Michael T. Bennett
 Mayor

Ventura County Fire Chief's Association:

Thank you all for the meaningful ceremony and special unveiling of the Firefighter's Memorial. It allowed myself and our firefighters to reflect on the importance and seriousness of our fire family. We were pleased that you took time with families. In fact there were many outstanding touches that added to the ceremony. Please extend our appreciation to all who worked behind the scenes.

Sincerely,
 John Scherrei
 Fire Chief
 County of Santa Barbara Fire Department

Dear Chief Roper:

Members of the Ventura County Sheriff's Department Narcotics Unit would like to extend their gratitude to the Ventura County Fire Department Hand Crews for their assistance during the 2008 marijuana eradication season. Over 58,000 marijuana plants were seized in seven major cultivation areas.

The cutting of landing/loading zones by the hand crews for the insertion of personnel and the removal of harvested plants was instrumental to the success of our missions. The hand crews provided an extra margin of safety and allowed for the timely removal of the plants, as well as personnel. These fine young men completed their tasks without complaint, and with a "can-do" attitude. The entire Narcotics Unit would like to commend the Fire Department Hand Crews for their professionalism and commitment to their jobs, and we look forward to working with them again in the future.

Sincerely,
 Derek West
 Captain, Special Investigations Unit (Narcotics)

Dear Chief Roper:

On September 12, 2008, the Metrolink tragedy required an enormous multi-agency response, and the collaboration needed to mitigate this disaster set a new benchmark for the First Responder Community. Fire Service members and Law Enforcement officers worked seamlessly over the course of several hours to rescue, triage, treat and transport victims.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to you and the members of your agency who assisted the Los Angeles Fire Department in mitigating this catastrophic incident. Your leadership is instrumental in maintaining a strong association with other public safety entities, and your agency's willingness to respond and become a part of the solution saved many lives that day.

The horrendous nature of the Metrolink accident necessitated fortitude and perseverance to deal with conditions beyond description. Your members demonstrated the epitome of professionalism, and their actions reflected the strength of your leadership.

Please convey my heartfelt thanks to your members for their efforts and assistance.

Sincerely,
 Douglas L. Barry
 Fire Chief

