

# mid-coast fire brigade

## hot issues newsletter



October 2003



### WHAT IS THE MID COAST FIRE BRIGADE?

With so many new members of the community I thought that the first thing we should do is to explain a little bit about how the Brigade came to be.

The California Department Of Forestry And Fire Protection has the responsibility to provide fire protection in the wildlands, and will provide some emergency medical services, but these services are only provided during their fire season staffing period, which runs from June to October. Concerned citizens wanting to provide fire and emergency medical services to a community that was often without officially organized the Mid-Coast Fire Brigade in June of 1979. The Fire Brigade is made up from community members who **volunteer** their time to provide these services to our community. There are nine men and women currently serving on the Mid-Coast Fire Brigade with five fire fighting apparatus. These volunteers have been trained in emergency medical intervention, including CPR, defibrillation, and firefighting skills. They meet twice a month to practice their skills; they are dedicated to provide you with the essential services of fire and life safety you deserve. However, as with most organizations, the organization is only as good as its weakest link, without the support of the community, the Fire Brigade cannot exist.

### RETIREMENT

We are announcing the retirement of Bill Nye who retired in 2001 after 17 years of service, Jim and Barbara Cox, Lee and Myrtle Falkenberg, who retired in February of this year after 23 years of service. Thank you for all your dedicated years of service to the community. We hope you enjoy your retirement and your quiet evenings. We also regretfully acknowledge the passing of Kim Everett in 2001 that served the community for 15 years. A service was held at the fire station site where we rang the traditional fire service last alarm.

### SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would also like to take this time to acknowledge a very special member of the Brigade. Although he likes to remain in the background, he is very much our voice of calm and reason. This special person is of course **Captain Norm Cotton**. Norm is now the only original member left of a fire brigade that started many moons before it was officially organized. Norm is always there when we need him; he still attends every training drill with enthusiasm. Norm has been single handedly grading the fire station site. Norm we don't say it often enough, but we thank you for all the years you've given the community, for all your hard work and for your dedication. We couldn't do it without you!

### FROM THE CHIEF

It's hard to believe that it's been almost three years since our last newsletter. The Brigade has delayed the writing of a newsletter in anticipation of having some sort of positive news on the construction of the fire station. We continued to hope that we would have news any day. Days turned into weeks and time continued to slip on by with no definite news. We now have exciting news that we would like to share with all of you and update you on the activities of the last three years. I would like to personally take the time to thank the community members who have taken the time to offer words of encouragement, assistance and appreciation for what the Brigade members give up and do for the community. To know that the community genuinely appreciates what we do, makes the long hours of training, missed family time, missed dinners, missed birthdays, and missed or greatly delayed Holidays worthwhile.

### FIRE STATION UPDATE

After more than 20 years of soliciting the community and other organizations for funds to build the fire station, in January of 2000 after I assumed the duties of Fire Chief one of my first priorities was to assess where we stood financially. I discovered that the Brigade had saved \$152,000 of an anticipated cost of \$325,000 needed to build the fire station. I quickly realized that each day we wavered on a decision to build costs continued to rise. It was time to make a decision to either forge ahead or realize that a station was something we would never be able to have and return the donated money. I personally believe that quitting is never an option and the Brigade members agreed.

We elicited the help of The Auxiliary who are essential in fund raising and grant writing activities to secure additional funding. With a very generous donation from a community family, a grant from the Monterey Community Foundation, increased funding from the Big Sur Marathon (thanks to the Auxiliary) and an opportunity to receive funds from Monterey Peninsula Community College for training classes that the Brigade hosted and taught, we had increased our savings in two years to \$300,000 and felt that we finally had enough funds to at least get started. In November of 2002 with a grading permit in hand the Brigade hosted the groundbreaking ceremony at the fire station site. At the groundbreaking ceremony Frank Pinney of Pinney Construction in Big Sur offered his services to get the Brigade started. After meeting with Rob Carver and discovering that we were now looking at an anticipated cost of over \$475,000 to build the fire station as designed, we took a short break to explore several options for building that had been brought to our attention by Frank. We felt that this was necessary to assure that the Brigade was building a station that would meet

## **Fire Station Update Continued**

it's needs, fit into the community yet spend money wisely. We also realized that in order to build we could not build the station as an owner builder as liability insurance was astronomical and we needed a general contractor. In stepped Charlie McClaskey of Canyon Builders here in Palo Colorado. The Brigade settled on what we considered to be the best way to spend money on a building that would meet all the needs we had set. With pen in a very shaky hand contracts were signed in July.

If you have driven by the fire station site or attended the Labor Day BBQ you will have noticed that grading has begun. Rob Carver has been working very hard to assure that all the drawings and engineering work come together to submit the plans to the building department. We hope to have plans submitted by November 1<sup>st</sup>, but there are many people involved, electrical, mechanical and structural engineers, a delay by any could delay our submittal. Once the plans are submitted we are looking at an eight-week turn around for permits. We had originally hoped to have the building up before Christmas, delays by many different elements held up the submittal of the plans, we are now hoping at the very minimal to have the massive retaining wall and foundation in place before the first rains.

With a budget of \$300,000 we are starting a project knowing that we are short approximately \$65,000 and we are asking for all property owners, home owners and renters to dig deep and donate to make this fire station a reality. Raising the \$65,000 will get the building up however; we will still not have the funds for doors, windows, roofing material or stucco. Once again the question was raised, should we wait until we have all the needed funds? Yet again we are reminded that the longer we wait, the more costs will continue to rise and the fire station becomes, little by little, just out of our reach. We are very hopeful that this community will pull together and make a 25-year dream a reality.

## **PLEASE DONATE YEARLY**

I had an opportunity to read a newsletter that was written over 15 years ago by Brigade members. The message was the same as the message that I would like to send out to you now. Please send yearly donations. Without your donations the Fire Brigade cannot exist. We currently receive \$28,000 dollars a year from Proposition 172 funds. The County is itself having financial difficulties and is asking that all fire departments take a cut in their current funding amounts and may take all funds that they are currently awarding away. This could be potentially devastating to our small Fire Brigade

Currently the Brigade is paying \$12,000 a year for Workers Compensation Insurance and we anticipate those rates to dramatically increase over the next year. We must also carry liability insurance on all our fire apparatus at a cost of \$6,000 per year. This is liability only as all apparatus are over 30 years old and to carry compensation and collision would triple our current costs. Next we must carry liability insurance on our property at a cost of \$2,000 per year. As soon as we start to build we will have to carry Course Of

Construction Insurance at a cost of approximately \$3,000 per year for a total cost of yearly mandatory expenses of \$23,000. These figures do not include maintenance on the equipment, which generally runs \$5,000 per year (due in part to the age of the vehicles and in part to the harsh weather conditions as the apparatus is stored outside), fuel for the apparatus \$1,000 per year, medical supplies \$1,000 per year, equipment replacement such as radios, protective clothing for the firefighters, lost or damaged equipment on calls generally \$5,000 per year nor does this cover training expenses or allow saving any money for the fire station. Residents in non-rural areas pay taxes for fire protection, fire departments as small as ours work with budgets well over a million a year.

When Doctor and Virginia Mudd passed away the Brigade lost it's biggest supporters, I am sure many of you are unaware that when the Brigade really needed something, Doctor Mudd wrote the check including paying for fuel for all the Fire Apparatus. We beg you to donate yearly to the Fire Brigade to continue to have the services available to you that you have become accustomed to having. We have an estimated 469 residences in our area and currently receive donations from only 70 families. We would like to suggest a yearly donation amount of \$200.00 per family, which works out to \$16.67 per month. If you cannot afford \$200.00 please do not let that stop you from donating, any amount will definitely help to continue to assure that this community has life and fire protection. Donations can be sent to: Mid Coast Fire Brigade, Palo Colorado Road, Carmel, CA 93923.

## **MAPPING**

Well over a year ago Chief and Assistant Chief Goetz started an addressing and mapping program for the Brigades response area. Many residents wondered why we needed a book that mapped all homes and water sources. It seems that this has been done before. Where all that information went to I cannot say as I have only been with the Brigade for six years, but I will assure you that this information will be kept up to date and passed on to any future Chief. I can tell you that I personally do not know all residents of this area; neither does the current Brigade members. Without maps showing locations of homes we cannot find you in times of emergencies. Obviously if your home is on fire, locating it might be pretty simple, but what about that fall, broken leg, or sudden illness where you cannot stand outside and flag us down. In Palo Colorado we also find that all addresses are addressed off Palo Colorado Road, yes, even those at Twin Peaks. There are two dome houses; they are very far apart from each other, so which one do we go to??? Many times we get an address of 0 Palo Colorado Road, I still do not know where that is and if we don't know where that is how can we possibly get there for any kind of emergency. With many renters in the canyon most of the time names are not very helpful.

Our current set of maps show every structure in our area. Let me be the first to tell you that all Brigade members signed a letter recognizing the importance of anonymity for all community

### **Mapping Continued**

members, and that the information contained in our response books would not, under any circumstance, be shared with any other public agency. We recognize that many homes are built without permits, we don't care! Let me say that again, we don't care if your home is permitted; we only care about knowing that it is there. When you have an emergency, seconds seem like minutes and minutes seems like hours. Long delays have occurred when the Brigade has tried to locate a home. Please contact Chief Goetz at the Fire Brigade phone number (831) 625-8175 and make sure that your home is on the map.

### **WATER SOURCES**

We are also very interested in water sources. In our rural community we do not have the luxury of fire hydrants every 100 feet, but we do all have water tanks. However, if the Fire Brigade cannot reach the tank or if those tanks do not have the proper connections that the Brigade can use, they cannot use the water for firefighting purposes, making that water virtually useless in the event of a fire. Make sure your water tank has the appropriate fire department connections and if access is a problem or if the tank is located a distance from the road consider installing a fire hydrant. You can obtain these fire department connections through various vendors. We have successfully used Kennedy Brothers in Salinas (831) 753-6100. Now mark those connections so they are easily located with the standard markings. A red plaque with white reflective letters that simply states: "Fire Department Connection" hanging around or attached to the water source. Fashion Streaks in Sand City, will mail you the appropriate sign for a nominal charge of \$10. You can contact Fashion Streaks at (831) 393-0933.

### **HAVE YOUR ADDRESS POSTED AND VISIBLE**

Once again it is time for me to stand up on my soapbox and ask that you please obtain and post your address at the end of your driveway so the Fire Brigade can find you easily. Numbers should be a minimum of 4" in height and should be reflective to be easily read at night from both directions of travel. Please remember that emergency vehicles at times can come from up the canyon or down the canyon and it is important that we are able to read your address no matter which direction we come from. Most people want to protect their privacy or believe that they moved to this area to avoid complying with rules of the city and then of course, nothing will ever happen to them, right? Some also think only about a house fire, which would be easily recognizable, but what about an emergency medical situation, where seconds count? If we can't find you, we can't help. Please do not use pole numbers or mile markers to substitute for an address, remember fire apparatus come from two directions and we do not have electrical poles on our response maps. I would also like to point out the ever-present threat of a wildland fire. I can tell you from experience that during a wildland fire, resources will be arriving from all over the state. Many of our

roads look like driveways and some driveways are hard if not impossible to find even knowing the area. You want the firefighters to be able to identify your home quickly. If you don't have an address you can obtain one easily by contacting the Monterey County Department of Public Works at (831) 755-4800 or by writing them at 312 E. Alisal Street, Salinas, CA 93901. You will need to supply your assessors parcel number and a check for \$25.00. You can even obtain an address from Public Works for vacant property. Once you obtain your address please call the Fire Brigade with your name, assessors parcel number, phone number and address. The Fire Brigade will make sure that your new address is added to the response books. *All information is strictly confidential and will not be shared with any other public agency!* **Remember when the Heat is on, seconds count.**

### **CLEAR ALL FLAMMABLE VEGETATION AROUND YOUR HOME**

In the event of a fire in the community you can help us to help you by providing defensible space that firefighters will need to save your home in a fire. Defensible space means clearing all flammable vegetation a minimum of 30' and in some cases depending on the slope 100' around your home. Replant with fire resistive native vegetation for erosion control. Limb trees 6-8 feet from the ground and keep your roof and gutters free from pine needles and leaves.

### **NOW THAT I'VE CLEARED AROUND MY HOME WHAT DO I DO WITH THE MATERIAL?**

The Fire Brigade in conjunction with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF) has instituted a chipper program in the community. We have found numerous community members that don't feel safe when burning piles. Chipping is an excellent alternative and you can use the chips in your garden. You would need to cut the vegetation and CDF will provide the chipper and the crews to do the chipping. This program runs from November to May. For more information, contact the Fire Brigade at (831) 625-8175.

### **WHAT ABOUT BURNING?**

It is not necessary to obtain a burn permit in the Mid-Coast Area to burn backyard clippings. It is illegal to burn anything other than yard clippings. **Before you burn-** Piles must not be any larger than 10x10. A line must be cleared to bare soil around the pile, someone must be in attendance at all times with water readily available in case of an escape. You can be held liable for any damages and suppression costs if your burn escapes the pile. You must also call the Monterey County Air Resources Board at (800) 225-BURN to find out if burning is permitted for that day. Also before you burn, please call the Fire Brigade and advise them that you are burning, your name, a contact phone number and location. This saves numerous fire responses to a planned pile burn. If no one answers, please leave a message with the above information. **Backyard burning is permitted from December 1 to April 30 only!**

## **APPOINTMENT WITH THE CHIEF**

If you are unsure what needs to be done to make your property fire safe, the Chief will visit your property to discuss just how much clearance is needed or a possible fire hydrant connection. You can contact the Chief at the Brigade number.

## **NEIGHBORHOOD COORDINATORS**

A neighborhood coordinator is a designated neighbor available for you to contact for any questions in *any non-emergency or ongoing emergency*, such as the closure of Highway 1 in the winter of '98 or the Kirk Fire of '99. Your neighborhood coordinator will be in contact with a member of the Fire Brigade and will keep you informed of possible evacuations and evacuation routes. This will keep phone calls to the Brigade to a minimum allowing the firefighters to concentrate on the emergency. If you don't know who your coordinator is you can find out by contacting Eve Delunas who is the coordinator of the neighborhood coordinators, her phone number is (831) 626-3324. **If you have an emergency call 9-1-1.**

## **PLEASE CALL 9-1-1 IN AN EMERGENCY**

In an emergency time is of the essence. When you call 9-1-1 the operator will contact the proper authorities facilitating a prompt response. If you call the Fire Brigade number or a Fire Brigade member, before they can respond, they will have to call 9-1-1 to turn in the emergency to get the proper equipment coming. Remember, the Fire Brigade members are volunteers, they work, and they go out of the community during the week and on the weekends and may not be home. Calling 9-1-1 will get you help in the quickest fashion.

## **JOINING THE FIRE BRIGADE**

**What is Required?** You must live or work in the area. Members must take and pass at minimum Medical First Responder, CPR and Defibrillation courses. These courses are given throughout the year by various agencies. Attend training drills twice a month and respond at a moments notice to help your neighbor. Assist with the Big Sur Marathon in April and the Annual Halloween Trick Or Treat Ride. Currently the Fire Brigade has nine and soon to be ten members. Unfortunately only five members of the Brigade are homeowners, the rest are renters. We have already lost a few great volunteers because they lost their rental and could not find any other rentals in our response area. Please consider joining. Contact the Fire Brigade for more information.

## **The Auxiliary**

What's that, you say you don't have the time to join the Fire Brigade? Another priority when I took over as Fire Chief was to form the Auxiliary. I realized that there were many community members that wanted to help but did not have the time to commit to the demands of the Fire Brigade. The Auxiliary was formed to support the Brigade. The Auxiliary meets on an as needed basis. The Auxiliary writes grants, organizes the Labor Day

## **Auxiliary Continued**

BBQ, and host's fundraisers. If you have any talent such as typing, organizational skills, photography, etc. the Auxiliary can most definitely use your help. Please get involved. For more information on how you can help, call Deborah Streeter or Ron Cook at (831) 624-6581.

## **HALLOWEEN**

Last year the Halloween ride was almost forgotten. None of the Fire Brigade members have small children so it is something we simply did not think about. I received a phone call from Laurie Zobler who offered to take over the Halloween party. Laurie has simplified the Brigades involvement to where we just need to show up with the engines to provide the ride. If you have children that participate in the Halloween festivities, please contact Laurie to see what you can do to help. This is yet another example of community involvement and a way to help. We also would like to point out that in another year the station will be built and the Brigade will be down to two fire engines. There is becoming less and less room on the engines as more and more firefighting equipment is being added. It may be time for the community to think of another way to transport the children up the canyon. Priority will be given on the fire engines to the small children. Also, last year we were down to only four stops in the canyon. The ride will start at Highway 1 and Palo Colorado Road and will end at the top of the Murray Grade, please consider setting up a candy stop in the lower canyon! You can contact Laurie at (831) 625-5404.

## **UNSUNG HEROES**

I wanted to let you know of a few unsung heroes in the area. Last year a resident of the area asked what the Brigade did for water during fires. We talked about the lack of water and how generally there wasn't enough water in the creek to draft, so this resident decided to install a well in the canyon with a deed restriction that allows the water to only be used by the Fire Brigade in emergencies. This resident is Tom McGregor. Tom spent an enormous amount of money to make sure that during an emergency the Brigade and community would have a definite water supply. Thank you Tom! Also we would like to acknowledge the tireless work of Rob Carver. Rob served as a volunteer firefighter for many years. Rob also was the force that secured the donated land for the fire station site, designed the station and has donated an enormous amount of time and energy to assure that this community has a fire station. Without his help this Brigade would never have been able to afford to build a station. Thank you Rob for all your work and for always believing and making us believe that this station could be a reality. You are our hero!

## **KNOX LOCK PROGRAM**

In 2002 Mid Coast Fire Brigade instituted the Knox Lock Program for our response area. As you can well imagine trying to keep track of the numerous combinations of gates, which have a tendency to get changed occasionally without

### **Knox Lock Program Continued**

notification to the Brigade, we needed to come up with a secure better way to access gates and save valuable time trying to find someone who knows the combination. Someone said, well just cut the locks or chains. That sounds great, except then the lock or chain remains unlocked until someone can fix or replace it and we leave leaving the property unsecured. The Knox Lock Program was the perfect answer. The Knox Company has been in business for over 50 years providing fire departments and their citizens with rapid access and high security. In order to obtain a lock from the company you must first have a signed authorization from the Chief. The lock is then mailed to you in the locked position. In order to install the lock you must contact the Brigade who will then open and install the lock for you. The keys are kept in combination boxes on the fire engines with combinations that can and will be changed each time a Brigade member leaves the Brigade to maintain high security. Keys are only obtainable by the Fire Chief through the company and cannot be duplicated, as they are unique and are five sided cut keys. Departments throughout Monterey County and the State Of California use this system and each department has a unique key. This means extra security for you, as someone from a neighboring department cannot use their key to access any gate in the Mid Coast area. Currently the program is voluntary however the California Department of Forestry And Fire Protection (CDF) that approves plans for new construction or additions will be requiring the Knox Lock on all gates leading to your property. CDF will not have keys to access any of the locks in the Mid Coast area to assure your privacy. Locks can be obtained in padlock format, installed for electric gates or boxes that can be mounted on a post on or adjacent to the fence. We have already installed several of these locks in our area and look forward to the day that they will be on all gates. For more information regarding this program you can contact the Chief at the Brigade phone number.

### **SILENT AUCTION FUNDRAISER**

After much discussion with Rob Carver and Charley McClaskey, I asked them to provide the Brigade with a bottom dollars cost to just “get the building up”. They came back with a figure of \$365,000 and stated that this figure was minus, doors, windows, roofing material and stucco. We discovered that the Brigade was short \$65,000. How could we possibly raise that kind of money quickly? I called the Auxiliary and asked for a meeting to discuss a fund raising event.

The Auxiliary met and after a little discussion the idea of a Silent Auction was raised. Now we needed a location and a way to raise money without spending money. The Auxiliary has done an outstanding job soliciting local artists and other vendors for items for the auction that will include: Travel, Fine Wines, Jewelry and Fine Arts. A local family offered their spectacular home for the fundraising event and even offered to pay for the food. This event will take place on Saturday, December 7, 2003 from 3pm to 6pm. A donation of \$75.00 per person, regardless of age will be required to attend. Come enjoy wine, hors d’oeuvres and dessert. We are looking forward to this wonderful event that will kick off the Holiday Season and hope for a spectacular sunset as well.

I would like to remind anyone that wishes to attend that our goal is to raise the money needed to build the fire station. We respectfully request that if you plan to attend that you be prepared to bid at the Silent Auction. Minimum bids will be established for each item however, no item will be under \$100 and some will be much higher. We have asked each contributor to the auction to place a value of the item for auction.

Unfortunately we only have room for 100 guests so please confirm your attendance early. Confirmations will only be acknowledged upon receipt of your attendance donation. Attire for the event will be smart casual.

Mid-Coast Fire Brigade is a Non-Profit (c)3 organization and all donations are tax deductible.

### **RESPONSE STATISTICS FROM JANUARY 2000 THROUGH OCTOBER 2003**

Traffic Collisions	65
Coastal Incidents	10
Smoke Checks	12
Structure Fires	3
Vegetation Fires	6
Improvement Fires	3
Medical Aids	59
Fire Menace Standbys	1
Hazardous Conditions	16
Residential Alarm	6
Hazardous Material	2
Public Assist	3
Vehicle Fire	1
Total Responses	186

### **IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS**

Mid-Coast Fire Brigade	(831) 625-8175
Mid-Coast Fire Brigade Fax	(831) 625-8175
Fire Chief Home	(831) 624-8287
Brigade Auxiliary	(831) 624-6581
Neighborhood Coordinator	(831) 626-3324
Halloween Coordinator	(831) 625-5404
Sheriff Non Emergency	(831) 647-7911
CHP Non Emergency	(831) 455-4800
PG&E	(800) 743-5002
Air Resources Board	(800) 225-BURN
Dept. Of Public Works	(831) 755-4800
Fashion Streaks	(831) 393-0933
Kennedy Brothers	(831) 753-6100
Emergency Medical or Police	<b>9-1-1</b>

## AREA FIRE HISTORY

Many residents have inquired about the fire history of the area. I found an article that was from an old Mid Coast Fire Brigade newsletter. The article was originally written and researched by Carol Kobus, a few items have been updated. As with anything, I hope when you read this history you take it to heart and realize that a fire can and will occur in this area again, this time with a much higher loss as there are many, many more residents. Let's learn from our history and make sure you provide defensible space around your home. After all history usually repeats itself.

In the area served by the Mid Coast Fire Brigade, the earliest fire of any size I recall hearing about was sometime around the turn of the century. It burned out into Rocky Creek far enough to destroy the big house of the Murray family. The fire burned the interior of the Santa Lucias but didn't reach the coast. It might have been the one Robinson Jeffers referred to in "CONDOR" as occurring in 1909, on the other hand it could have been in 1911 when there was a major wildland blaze that destroyed thousands of acres of National Forest land. "Rosemont", as the Murray home was called, because it was literally covered with rose bushes, was a replacement for the original house that had burned down earlier. The present house (Ruth Albee's) was then a combination storehouse, tack and feed shed. It escaped burning and the family moved into it after the fire. Miss Murray spoke with pride later of the way her aged mother had exited the threatened house with immense calm and dignity and without a backward glance while the rest of the household scrambled madly grabbing furniture and other possessions and carrying them out to safety in an open space away from the house.

In December 1917, just before the logging camp started logging operations in Bixby Creek, the crew started burning debris and undergrowth in the woods to facilitate work there and the fire got away and went roaring up the mountains toward Rocky Creek and Arthur LaChance's Ranch, which was later Barney Segal's and which now belongs to the Monterey County Regional Parks. The winter had been dry and there had been no rain in December so things burned fast. It crossed the summit of Long Ridge quickly and then burned slowly downhill to LaChance's barn and cabin. The Rounds (later to marry and become a Goetz) were then living at the homestead in Turner Creek, and when they heard the fire had gotten away and was threatening LaChance they grabbed tools and hiked down the ridge trail to help save the buildings. The fire was already burning across the trail in places, and Mrs. Rounds gathered her skirt tight around her and ran through the fire as fast as she could. When they reached LaChance's the fire was right up to the fence near the barn so they put it out along the fence and saved the barn and cabin, Arthur LaChance as well, for he was disabled and unable to fight the fire himself.

The 1924 fire was the "BIG ONE" until the Marble Cone Fire in 1977 broke the record. The 1924 fire started in Danish Creek on the other side of the range in the Carmel River drainage on August 26<sup>th</sup>, and burned 49,400 acres before the rain finally put it out on October 4<sup>th</sup>. It was said to have been started by a honeymooning couple out for a hike that failed to practice safe smoking rules. Instead of stomping it out when it first started, they panicked and ran.

Once started, this fire traveled all over the map, pushed southward by the wind and then northerly and westward. Whenever it moved, each rancher saw it as an opportunity to get rid of whatever brush bothered him the most, so it wasn't fought very seriously until it threatened someone's improvements. It became a threat to the coastal side when it reached the Big Pines, where Francis and Jake Goetz fought it alongside ranchers from Cachagua. The United States Forest Service fought this fire on federal land, but much of the land at that time was in private ownership and received no federal help.

William Randolph Hurst, who owned much of the North Fork of the Little Sur River at that time, bankrolled the firefighting there. A fire camp was established at Botchers Gap. Jules Kahofer, who lived at Pico Blanco, packed supplies to the firefighters and worked a two-week stretch almost without rest toward the end. Old man Hoffman, who owned Hoffman's Resort in Palo Colorado (now the location of the lower Dome House on Palo Colorado Road), was fire boss and the resort-supplied food to the fire lines. With Hurst paying for all supplies and the payroll, Hoffman was getting indecently rich from the operation. He also ordered all sightseers stopped at Hoffman's Camp and turned back. This was in no way justified at the time, but the rubbernecks invariably stayed long enough to eat a dinner at the resort, which was frosting on Hoffman's cake. Naturally, as long as the Bonanza continued, nobody was going to try very seriously to put the fire out. For example, they had an excellent chance to halt the fire at Devils Peak that led into a previous burn near the Mead Spring in back of Twin Peaks, but a decision was made to let the fire burn down into Rocky Creek where the Alder Creek Fork joined it, because it was open and grassy and would be easier to fight. That night an east wind of near gale force came up and the fire exploded, heading straight for Palo Colorado and Hoffman's Camp. Overnight the fire swept from Devils Peak nearly to the Hoist destroying cabins and thousands of dollars worth of split redwood products and everything in its path. The firefighters fled before a panicked fire boss started several backfires with complete disregard for the consequences in a frenzied effort to save his resort.

The main fire and the backfires met in Brandon Gulch where another cabin burned, and four more cabins went up in smoke at the sawmill flat where the Rounds family later made their home. The Murray house would have burned if Stanley Dani and a crew from Big Sur hadn't arrived in time to save it. The Rounds family at this time lived at the LaChance place. Mrs. Rounds and her daughter Mary wielded hose to put out spot fires in the fields and up the hillsides. The network of trails made by their herd of milk goats helped immensely in controlling the fire here, for the spot fires could be put out quickly as they reached these trails.

Over in Little Sur the firefighters dropped their tools and fled as the fire roared down on them, meanwhile, Jules Kahofer had collapsed from fatigue in his cabin on Pico Blanco. A family named Carlyle who used to camp in Little Sur every summer heard he was in there alone and they hiked up Pico Blanco to his cabin and found him unconscious with the fire burning past his buildings. He said afterward he would have died if they hadn't come. The east wind finally blew in a rainstorm that mercifully ended the fire on Oat Flat Ridge behind Hoffman's Camp on October 4<sup>th</sup>. By then it had burned from the hills behind Carmel Highlands to the Big Sur River tributaries of Ventana Creek and Doolan's Hole, and from Carmel River almost to the coast.

In August 1939, a fire started by what was believed to be careless smoking on the southwestern slopes of Bixby Mountain, burning 10,000 acres before it was controlled. It was pushed by strong winds and it burned over most of the Mountain to Botchers Gap and into Little Sur and almost to the coast in Bixby Canyon. It burned into Upper Bixby Canyon and was stopped at the Hoist. This fire killed Joe Calandra of Napa, who worked for the California Department Of Forestry And Fire Protection and was stationed in King City and Carmel Valley. Because Joe was an experienced firefighter it was believed fatigue from chasing fires in various parts of the county for four days straight with little sleep had impaired his judgment or disoriented him, causing him to get trapped in the fire and burn to death near a spring on Bixby Mountain. Age 23 at the time of his death, he was to have been married in two weeks, and a bachelor party had been planned for him the week he died. A fire lookout near Lockwood was named after Joe and was known as the Calandra lookout. 1939 was a very bad year for lightning fires it was, in all respects, the worst fire season in 20 years. Mrs. Frida Sharpe, who owned a restaurant at Bixby Bridge, cooked for the fire crews on this fire and writer Lynda Sargent washed the dishes.

On a late afternoon in October of 1941, a fire broke out behind a cabin in the upper Garrapatos where a big weekend BBQ had taken place, and it was always suspected that there was a connection between the party and the fire. Strong winds from the northwest pushed this blaze to Rocky Creek almost overnight destroying some cabins along the way. It burned out Garrapatos, Palo Colorado and Upper Rocky Creek and burned out over Oak Flat Ridge to the coast at Westmere. The Smith's saved the old house by keeping the roof wet with the help of a bucket brigade, as did the Rounds and Goetz families. The State crews told them they had better leave while they could, and added they could not risk equipment or personnel trying to save the structures in such a dangerous location. The families stayed and saved the houses by the bucket brigade method. The blackberry vines between the creek and the buildings gave them the most trouble; burning like kerosene and spitting sparks all the way up and onto the roofs. This fire was followed by an unusually wet winter. There were a total of seven floods, which destroyed the county road. When it was rebuilt, it was rerouted with fewer crossings of the creek. This fire was visible from Munras in Monterey soon after it broke out as a huge black mushroom looming above Jacks Peak. I watched it from the school bus.

The summer of 1949 brought two fires to Bixby Mountain. In June a fire started at the summit in Bear Trap Canyon owned by Charles Vander Ploeg, and in addition to the mill it destroyed several cabins as well as trucks and other vehicles. It was of suspicious origin, but the suspect, a delinquent rich kid from Pebble Beach who used to hang out in the area, was never arrested. Altogether 123 acres of timber, 120 acres of new growth, 208 acres of brush and grass burned. Two loggers burned to death in Bear Trap Canyon while trying to retrieve a new chainsaw that had just been purchased. They died in the creek bed, one man trying to shield the other from the flames. One of the men left a wife and two small children. In August the same summer a fire started at the Gregg Ranch at the summit of Bixby Mountain and burned the cabin and one other nearby and it burned part of Mescal Ridge and Bixby Canyon. The fire started when a dog that belonged to some deer hunters staying at the cabin knocked over a lantern while chasing a rat.

In October of 1954, the Devil Fire so called because it started on the lower side of Devils Peak, on the Skinner Creek side by the trail into Skinner Canyon. It was believed to have started from a smoldering cigarette. It was a clear, windy day and smoke from a controlled burn in Santa Clara County was carried clear down into the Santa Lucia Mountains so the smoke from the fire on Devils Peak was mistaken at first for smoke from Santa Clara. The firefighters didn't get started on it until the middle of the night when the glow of flames could be seen. By morning, it was boiling up good from Skinner Ridge. It burned about a week, southward at first and then in a northerly direction with a shift in wind. By the time rain finally put this one out it had covered an area that extended from the North Fork of the Little Sur to the northern edge of the Garrapatos drainage. It cleaned out the entire headwaters of Garrapatos, Palo Colorado, and Rocky Creek, and came about halfway down to the Hoist. It took out Skinner Canyon and a couple of ridges that drop down into the Little Sur from Devil's Peak. There was a United States Forest Service fire camp at Botchers Gap and a CDF fire camp at Segal's ranch. The fire threatened the San Carlos ranch and the White Rock Club. At White Rock, it set a propane tank afire, and the tank came loose and was zooming erratically all over the place trailing a long tail of flame.

There have been numerous other small fires since the large ones mentioned above, none much above 50 acres or as spectacular until the Kirk Fire of 1999, which hit pretty close to home. The Brigade officially started keeping records in 1996 of calls they responded to, since 1996 the Brigade has responded to over 30 vegetation fires in our area. Right now the coastal area is in its peak for fire danger, the fog generally stays offshore or low

in the bottom of the canyons. This is the time of year we generally get the offshore flow; a fire that starts high in the canyon could potentially burn to the great Pacific fuel break in record time. As I sit here and write this I have just received a fax for a severe fire weather watch through the weekend as the National Weather Service is predicting a strong offshore flow. We provided a fire engine mutual aid to the Fort Ord Fire on October 24th. Since the mapping project we have found trees overhanging the road, or roads so narrow in spots due in part to vegetation growth or erosion that emergency vehicles will not be able to make access to protect your home. While your number one priority may be to save your home our number one priority is safety and going home to our families when all is said and done, we can't help you if you don't take the time to provide clearance and the proper access, if you have trouble fitting your car up or down your road, imagine what it would be like in an emergency vehicle (big fire truck). As I write this we are watching the news and listening in awe to the horrible fires in southern California. Hundreds of thousands of acres, hundreds of homes destroyed, 14 deaths or more, some people who died in their cars trying to escape the flames. We all think that it will never happen to us. I'm sure that every one of the homeowners who lost their homes to fires felt the same way. But it can happen to us. It has happened to us in the not too distant past. The conditions that caused the disastrous fires of the past are still with us today; the terrain, the fuels, the weather and the winds. As a matter of fact the conditions are worse than they were in the past. The last significant fire in our area was over 50 years ago and the brush fields have a very high percent of dead material in them, Sudden Oak Death is creating thousands of dead trees, hundreds of homes now exist where in the past only a few cabins existed. It is more a matter of when, not if, the conditions will again be right for the next disastrous fire in our area.

Please learn from our past history and take the time to help us to help you in the event of a wildland fire, provide defensible space.

Cheryl Goetz,  
Fire Chief  
Mid-Coast Fire Brigade

## MID-COAST FIRE BRIGADE ANNUAL DONATION

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**Mid-Coast Fire Brigade thanks you in advance for your generous donation!**