

Big Sur Fire Round Up Report – December 2017

I want to start with saying how wonderful it was for Nepenthe to again host our annual dinner this month, in spite of their many months of being closed and yet more months of being open only on a limited basis for pretty much “hikers” only. It was just a wonderful evening with, of course, delicious dinners for all. This year we did not have most of the usual special awards; the Officers felt that everyone did such a great job all year long with the bridge being out that all members should be acknowledged. There were several “honorable mentions” for those going above and beyond, Jeannie Alexander and Marcus Foster on the south side and Trey Kropp and Rayner Marx on the north side all really stepped up to help out. I don’t know how many times I heard Trey say, “I’m running down/up the trail, on my way!!

We do have one award every year that is the Chiefs award. This award is not for the regular members who are eligible to receive the other volunteer awards. This was started almost 20 years ago by Frank Pinney to honor other members like Board members and Officers. While the other awards are a joint decision by the Officers, the Chief makes the decision who will receive this award.

This year I felt strongly it was so well deserved I would make the award. And, drum roll!!!!..... it went to Fire Captain Matt Harris!! Matt has come so far since joining us 9 years ago. He is the Captain of our south coast engine in Gorda and has for the most part taken over all our trainings. He is also our rescue team leader, a VFF initially, then a FF1 and then he took the supplemental FF2 training. He is also an excellent instructor and was instrumental in organizing our first FF1 class this year. So if you see Matt congratulate him on receiving the 20th annual Chiefs award.

And thank you again to Nepenthe for having us!!

I sent out a brief email regarding the Ventana fire and as promised here is, as Paul Harvey used to say, the rest of the story... at 00:22 early Monday morning we got paged out for a vegetation fire in the area of Ventana, the night before we had gotten paged out for the same thing which turned out to be the moon coming up over the mountains which was quite red due to the smoke. So we thought this must be the same thing, but no, as Trey responded down Pfeiffer ridge he confirmed it was actually a real fire. Trey, Marcus and Rayner made an initial attack and were followed up by Jeff coming up from Partington. Jess responded with our small water tender with Jim Gray following up with the big one. Even before I leave my house I make a number of calls to the residents in the area, I reach Bill Burleigh and felt so bad to wake him up with the information a fire was coming his way. This is not what anyone wants to hear, especially someone who has already lost a home to a previous fire. He packs up the dogs and computer, turns on the sprinklers and leaves. I hear that Isa and the others higher up the ridge are aware and rolling out the hose. I start SO just in case we need help with any other evacuations. While I was enroute a Cal Fire BC was also on the way with one engine, USFS had a delayed response with their engines. December as we know, is not a good time for a fire, and it is even a worse time when you have another major fire using the majority of the fire fighters and apparatus. I talk to the USFS Division Chief on the phone and tell him we need help! A short time later USFS P17 arrives and we turn the IC over to him. I have Martine and Fabian show up POV and hike up to join in. We get another Cal Fire brush engine and 2 Gabilan crews, and several hours later a total of 3 USFS engines arrive. One is from Lassen forest and has been covering down at Pozo. We pretty much tapped out all available apparatus. A Cal Fire dozer responded and we had him staged at the Coastlands turnout. The possibility of air support for the morning is discussed. Marcus lets us know they have a hose lay all around the upper part of the fire. The lower part is burning above the Ventana campground. There are 4 campsites occupied and the security guard gives them a warning and offers up rooms for them. We eventually get released about 07:00 with Jess staying until almost noon, the tender operators are always the last to leave. A great job on the IA by FB members, yet again I am sure they made a difference! We need rain!!

Usually we take a break on fire trainings in December, but still have the rescue ones to keep us busy. In addition we had an auto extrication class just this Saturday. We got 2 wrecked cars to cut up and practice extricating a trapped victim. This is an all-day training practicing with specific tools that we have on each of our engines.

Just recently we got a call for a campfire about 120 feet off the highway just south of Molera on the East side of the highway. It was during those windy days we had. It does make one wonder what people are thinking! Fortunately SO was not far away and all 4 people were cited.

We had a visit again from Santa this month! Our first stop was the kids Christmas party at Ventana where the jolly "old" guy was mobbed by a large number of kids. He handed out lots of presents with help from his "elves", AKA Big Sur Fire FFs. We then made our stops in his big red "sleigh" at River Inn, Fernwood and ended up at Nepenthe where they nicely provided cookies and cider for us.

The ban on the burn season is still in effect!! And until we get some much needed rain I would assume it will not start. With a large part of southern California on fire it makes sense to me. Everyone still needs to get a permit each year.

From all of us at Big Sur Fire a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to all!!

Martha Karstens
Chief