

# The Jacob Journal

A Newsletter from Supervisor Dianne Jacob

November 2003

## AFTER THE CEDAR FIRE

### Out of the Destruction, Heroes are Everywhere

*Serving the Cities of:*  
El Cajon  
La Mesa  
Lemon Grove  
Poway  
Santee

*Serving the communities of:*  
Agua Caliente  
Allied Gardens  
Alpine  
Barrett  
Blossom Valley  
Bostonia  
Boulevard  
Campo  
Canebrake  
Casa de Oro  
Crest  
Cuyamaca  
Dehesa  
Del Cerro  
Descanso  
Dulzura  
Eucalyptus Hills  
Fernbrook  
Flinn Springs  
Granite Hills  
Grantville  
Guatay  
Harbison Canyon  
Jacumba  
Jamul  
Julian  
Lake Morena  
Lakeside  
Mount Helix  
Pine Hills  
Pine Valley  
Potrero  
Ramona  
Rancho San Diego  
Rolando  
San Carlos  
San Pasqual  
Santa Ysabel  
Shelter Valley  
Spring Valley  
Tecate  
Tierra del Sol  
Vallecitos  
Wynola

*Serving the Indian Reservations of:*  
Barona  
Campo  
Cosmit  
Cuyapaipe  
Inaja  
Jamul  
La Posta  
Manzanita  
Mesa Grande  
Santa Ysabel  
Sycuan  
Viejas

Our region has never known a greater challenge than the one we're facing right now. How can we have hope when entire communities have burned to the ground? How can we move forward when our grief is so strong?

After spending many days with victims of the Cedar Fire, I can report firsthand, that the devastation is no match for the goodness of the human spirit. When disaster was at its worst, here is a tiny sampling of the many ways our region was at its very best:

The firefighters who worked around-the-clock to fight fire and protect structures, especially firefighters from the Julian-Cuyamaca area who stayed at their posts after their own homes had burned.

Out-of-region firefighters from as far away as Montana who went without sleep and food to fight fire; especially Steve Rucker from Novato, CA who traveled the length of the state to a County that wasn't his own to protect lives and property. In doing so, he gave his own life and left us with a deeper understanding of what it means to serve others.

Hundreds of local service groups and churches who organized relief efforts for the hardest hit communities. From the Rancho San Diego Kiwanis who adopted the entire village

of Harbison Canyon to children at Blossom Valley Elementary School who staged a food drive to the cash gifts handed out by the Buddhist Association, generosity ran deep and wide. At central spots in hard-hit communities, the efforts of these groups are on display in rooms overflowing with donations.

Disaster volunteers who left their own

families and spent days on end comforting victims in shelters and centers.

Disaster officials, including sheriff's deputies, who lost homes in the fire but continued to patrol areas still threatened by fire.

People like Dave LaFrenz and Joe Markowicz, who started a website to pair victims with free places to stay in private homes. The same day they announced their plan, they had 25 willing homeowners.

Radio stations like KOGO and KFMB and television stations like KNSD and KGTV who abandoned lucrative

programming to raise money for fire relief.

Local restaurants, from the kitchen at Sycuan to Wynola Pizza Express and hundreds of restaurants in between, who donated thousands of dollars in meals during the fire.

All the private citizens who gave of themselves for victims, from the anonymous man who delivered generators to the high school girl who volunteered to baby-sit, these are the stories that will inspire us to rebuild.

I've never been more proud of the resilience of the people of the Second District, and I've never been more certain we will emerge from the ashes better and stronger than ever.



**Staying Strong:** A girl walks through the remains of a home destroyed by the Cedar Fire.



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# Flames are out, serious questions remain

**A**n October 25 *Union-Tribune* news story by staff writer Irene McCormack-Jackson eerily predicted it. “The weather triumvirate that firefighters fear— high temperatures, gusty winds and dry air— should overtake much of the county early today, causing concern that crews could be stretched thin if more fires start.”

That very same day, a small brush near Ramona would grow to become the single largest fire disaster in the history of the State.

As we set out to rebuild entire communities decimated by the fire, a clearer picture of the event is slowly coming into focus. It is time to take stock of what we knew before the Cedar Fire and the challenges we faced during the Cedar fire in order to prepare for the monumental rebuilding process in the months ahead.

Fires are a part of life for residents in the Back Country. In August of 2002, the 61,000-acre Pines Fire destroyed 37 homes acres in the Julian area and drove home the dangers of brittle dry brush conditions pervasive throughout the Back Country. The 10,000-acre Viejas Fire destroyed 11 homes in the Alpine area in 2001. Fueled by Santa Ana wind conditions, the fire happened outside of what the State says is San Diego County’s “fire season.”

At the CDF command base in Ramona on the morning of Sunday October 26, the brush was dry, the Santa Ana winds were strong but something was dramatically different than in fires past. Never before have I witnessed such a desperate scramble for fire-fighting resources. On a large white board in the CDF command center that Sunday, I saw a list of firefighting equipment that CDF needed- but did not have available- to adequately fight the fire. In addition, I heard CDF request local firefighting agencies *from* San Diego return *to* San Diego from other parts of the State. At 5 p.m. on Sunday, it was announced that no additional resources would be coming to help fight the Cedar Fire.

It is clear to me now, that well before that small brush fire in Ramona on Saturday night, before the wrangling for resources between the State and Federal governments, before federal assets were not permitted to join the firefighting effort, our County was already defenseless.

During a known period of extreme fire danger with a Red Flag weather alert in effect, our region was woefully unprotected. Back in March, a massive bark beetle infestation in the Back Country posed such a fire threat, the State of California declared a State of Emergency for San Diego County. On October 26, that same State found itself without the machines or the manpower to respond to the fire.

In July, with the help of the State agencies, the County’s Wildland Task Force issued a report on the severity of brush danger in the Back Country. “Presently, almost one-half of the vegetation in San Diego County’s wildland is over 50 years old. Another 30% is over 20 years old. This means that 80% of wildland areas in San Diego will burn explosively under typical periods of high fire danger,” the report read. The warnings were all there. Someone, somewhere, somehow left our region virtually naked against brushfire.

Visiting with unincorporated-area victims that terrible first day, one after another, their stories were the same. “Where are the planes?” “Where are the fire engines?” “We’ve had aerial support in the past. Why not now?”

As those same fire victims begin the transition toward normalcy, many will be starting from scratch. Many are angry, weary and overwhelmed by the road ahead. Local Assistance Centers in Ramona, Alpine and Valley Center will help speed the recovery process by consolidating assistance services in single locations. But, assistance centers cannot answer lingering questions about missing resources and the massive scope of this disaster.

The public deserves to know the answers to four questions. Why was our region without adequate resources *before* the fire began? Why wasn’t the fire put out during its first few hours? Why did it take so long for additional equipment to arrive? And who is responsible for the mistakes made along the way?

At my request, the County is seeking an independent investigation into the mishaps of the Cedar Fire. We need to find out what went wrong, when and by whom. Out of these answers will come more than closure for fire victims. Out of these answers, will come the changes we must make to ensure that this never happens again.



## RECOVERY AND REBUILDING INFORMATION

### Concerned about Erosion?

Protect your property from soil erosion. Free sandbags, gravel bags, straw wattles, plastic sheeting, seed mix and other materials are available. Visit one of four County Road Stations any day of the week from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

- Alpine: 2914 Tavern Road
- Julian: 1524 North Highway 78
- Lakeside: 13115 Willow Road
- Ramona: 116 Fifth Street

### The County Wants Your Burned Out Vehicle

Don't know how to get rid of a burned up car or truck? The County will help do it for free. Trucks, trailers and any other vehicle licensed or required to be licensed under California Vehicle Code are eligible. In the Julian area call (760) 940-2893. In East County call (619) 441-4264.

### Disposing of Debris?

Hauling off debris like ash and wood is the property owner's responsibility. Your waste disposal company may offer a discount for fire victims as well as providing dumpsters and roll-off bins. Questions? Contact the County's Fire Damage Hotline at (866) 402-6044. Here is a list of waste service providers:

- EDCO: (619) 278-7056
- Waste Management: (619) 596-5100
- Pacific Waste (619) 421-9400
- Ramona Disposal (Jemco) (760) 789-0516  
Julian residents call (760) 765-2091

### Hazardous Waste?

The County wants to help you get rid of hazardous and electronic waste such as televisions, cell phones, computer equipment and any leftover portions of products containing toxic chemicals.

Visit the County Road Station in Julian on November 22 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. The address is 1524 North Highway 78. Visit the Ramona Hazardous Waste Collection Facility by appointment only, every Saturday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The address is 324 Maple Street. House-bound seniors can arrange pick up by calling (877) 713-2784.

## Helpful Numbers to Keep at Hand

- |   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| ▪ County Emergency Recovery Hotline: general recovery information                       | 866-402-6044           |
| ▪ FEMA Hotline: registering for federal funding help                                    | 800-621-3362           |
| ▪ DPLU Hotline: how to rebuild, how to get building permit fees waived                  | 866-402-6044           |
| ▪ Small Business Administration: assistance for small businesses                        | 800-488-5323           |
| ▪ California Department of Insurance: insurance / fraud questions                       | 800-927-4357           |
| ▪ Sheriff's Communication Hotline: patrols and looting                                  | 858-565-5200           |
| ▪ San Diego County Assessor's Office: how to save on property taxes                     | 858-505-6262           |
| ▪ Department of Animal Services: how to locate lost pets                                | 619-236-4250           |
| ▪ Department of Environmental Health: questions about hazardous waste                   | 877-713-2784           |
| ▪ Aging and Independence Services: help finding transportation for elderly and disabled | 800-510-2020           |
| ▪ SDGE Cancellation / electricity status hotline  | 800-411-7343           |
| ▪ DMV: reporting lost identification  | 800-777-0133           |
| ▪ County Programs to offset rebuilding costs  | www.co.san-diego.ca.us |
| ▪ American Red Cross (1-866-GET-INFO)   | 866-438-4636           |

# Get The Jacob Journal!

The Jacob Journal will be mailed to you on a regular basis by request only. If you like what you've read, fill out the form below and mail it back to us at 1600 Pacific Highway, San Diego, CA 92101 or fax it to us at (619) 696-7253. You can also sign up to receive the Jacob Journal on our website at [www.diannejacob.com](http://www.diannejacob.com).

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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We hope to hear from you soon!

NOV-03

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