



# The Jacob Journal

A Newsletter from Supervisor Dianne Jacob

October 2007

## Angel Fire Puts Rural Fire Protection to the Test

### *Response Demonstrates Remarkable Improvements Since 2003 Cedar Fire*

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:  
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Campo  
Cosmit  
Cuyapaipe  
Inaja  
Jamul  
La Posta  
Manzanita  
Mesa Grande  
Santa Ysabel  
Sycuan  
Viejas

How can regional firefighting officials effectively test new systems, resources and preventative measures put in place since the catastrophic 2003 Cedar Fire?

Unfortunately, it takes a trial by fire.

A scary, real-time test is exactly what the region witnessed during last month's Angel Fire when, on a typically dry September Saturday, an illegal campfire outside Julian grew out of control and swept across more than 850 acres. Thankfully, no one was hurt and damage was minimal.

Because of the Angel Fire's potential to cause widespread damage—at one point it jumped Highway 78 and burned into the community of Whispering Pines—the fire marked the first time that many important capabilities enacted after the Cedar Fire were called on to perform together on a single incident.

If last year's Horse Fire, which charred mostly remote areas near Barrett Lake, was a warm-up, the Angel Fire was a more comprehensive exam and one that shows big improvements in the way our region fights wildfire.

### *Equipment at the Ready*

People watching the Angel Fire from

Julian's Main Street may have seen in action several of the County's more dramatic changes since 2003: two County-owned firefighting helicopters. Officials say the helicopters, each with a \$1.5 million price tag, were critical in protecting Whispering Pines.

A massive fire outside the region had stretched thin State resources and CAL FIRE did not have helicopters available during the early stages of the fire.

The helicopters are two of many new pieces of equipment now on hand to help rural fire agencies. In the last two years, the County has leveraged \$6.6 million to purchase 20 new vehicles, including water tenders, engines and rescue rigs.

Many of these vehicles are being maintained and operated by volunteer fire agencies that constantly struggle with funding. Five out of eight water tenders that fought the Angel Fire were County owned and maintained by volunteers.

### *Focus on Fuel*

While firefighters deserve tremendous credit for dousing dangerous flames, brush management fights fire before it starts, making firefighters' jobs easier.

Long before the Cedar Fire, fire officials warned of dangerous fuel loads in the backcountry. Low rainfall and a massive bark beetle infestation had the County searching for emergency funding to get rid of dead trees and contend with dry brush.



*Aerial Action during the Angel Fire*



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**Trial by Fire**

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Since then, drought conditions have worsened. Attention to dangerous fuel, however, has improved.

Thanks to \$45 million in Federal and County funding over 417,000 dead and diseased trees have been removed from high-risk areas— 1,436 trees were pulled from Whispering Pines before the Angel Fire.

In all, 18,400 acres are now better protected from fire, many flanking critical escape routes. Indeed, downed trees did not impede Angel Fire evacuations or the ability to get equipment to the fire lines.

Like dead tree removal, maintaining defensible space around homes and other structures helps firefighters keep flames at bay. Since 2004, the County and Cal Fire have joined forces to more aggressively ensure that property owners clear brush.

Newer County building codes, which require measures like boxed eaves and tempered glass, offer additional defense against fire.

As the Angel Fire burned through parts of Whispering Pines last month, 193 homes there were saved. Remarkably, only one structure was lost.

***Stronger Connections***

Saving lives is goal number one during emergencies. That means getting people out of harm's way. The County's mass notification telephone system is capable of reaching every house in San Diego County in less than

three hours with potentially life-saving directions. During the Angel Fire it alerted 1,300 homes to danger.

One of the region's biggest shortcomings during Cedar Fire was the inability of disaster officials to talk to one another. The Regional Communications System, the internal radio network used during emergencies, once was spotty and easily overwhelmed. After a \$20 million upgrade by the County, indications are that system performed well during the Angel Fire with 700 individuals from dozens of agencies using it at the same time.

Compared to 2003, the County's Emergency Operations Center was a more functional environment during the dramatic hours of the Angel Fire.

Considered the region's "nerve center" for coordination during large emergencies, the center's new computer and wireless technology transformed it from mediocre to state-of-the-art. New video conferencing, electronic status boards and a new Joint Information Center made for more streamlined communications among representatives from the dozens of agencies that must station the center during emergencies.

Recently implemented emergency management software helped keep officials on the same page.

Field reports, incident maps health information, power outages, evacuation orders and other critical information was



**FIREBIRD:** *The County's two firefighting helicopters have greatly helped snuff out wildfires, including the recent Angel Fire near Julian..*

website: [sdcountyemergency.com](http://sdcountyemergency.com). The site will be there during future fires too and provide residents with current information.

***Consolidation***

Of all the improvements made since the Cedar Fire, bringing together the many fractured fire agencies in the rural areas has been, arguably, the biggest challenge. The effort took a giant leap forward this year when officials voted to press on with the first phase of a plan to turn the now scattered network of unevenly funded fire agencies into a more cohesive unit.

The first phase calls for a single fire agency to provide fire and emergency medical services to more than half of the entire County—more than 1.4 million acres, including about 950,000 acres served only by volunteer fire departments.

The plan, crafted by the Local Agency Formation Commission which oversees the creation of new public entities, hinges on officials securing millions of additional dollars for the merger—a task Supervisor Jacob has been

# Lakeside Baseball Park

Like pros fielding routine grounders, the ceremonial shovels hit the dirt this afternoon at the site of the future Lakeside Baseball Park.

Supervisor Jacob, the County Department of Parks and Recreation and officials from the Lakeside National Little League joined eager young baseball players to begin

construction of the multi-million dollar baseball park.

“Lakeside’s young people need and deserve this park. That’s why we’re turning this dirt into diamonds— four diamonds to be exact, each one with state-of-the-art synthetic turf,” said a smiling Supervisor Jacob who proposed the concept of the baseball park to her colleagues in 2002. “The County and the community have paid endless attention to detail. This park is going to be a true gem,” she said.

Next to the San Diego River at the corner of Mast Boulevard and the future Marathon Parkway in Lakeside, the baseball park will be built on ten acres of County-owned property and will feature two batting cages, a playground, concession stand and restrooms.



Park supporters hope the new facility will give young Lakeside sluggers a leg up on national competitions, as well as attract larger tournaments to East County.

Team members from the Lakeside National Little League contributed to the park’s design by providing recommendations for amenities.

“This park was designed for young people, by young people, and that’s just cool,” said Troy Kuenne, president of the Lakeside National Little League which will manage and operate the baseball park once it’s completed. “We’ve got about 300 players in the league right now, and I’m hoping this new park will attract even more. It will ensure that future generations share the positive experience of Little League,” Kuenne said.

Construction is expected to cost \$8.5 million, and does not include the purchase of the land.

## Trial by Fire Continued from page 2

working on, particularly in the form of State legislation currently on hold in Sacramento.



In the meantime, the County has entered into contracts with 18 fire agencies in the unincorporated area to keep seasonal fire stations open year round. The \$8.5 million per year endeavor is proof positive of the County’s deeper commitment to better regional fire protection.

In total, since the Cedar Fire, the County has invested more than \$117 million dollars to make the region safer from fire.

We don’t know where the next fire will happen, but we do know that we’re better prepared to fight it than we were four years ago.

## Coffee and Conversation

Got an idea to improve County government? Share your thoughts with Supervisor Jacob at her next informal community coffee.

**Friday, November 9 at 8:30 a.m.**

**Barrett Junction Café  
Highway 94  
Dulzura**



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