

It's a dirty job and volunteers

12-1-82

EDITOR'S NOTE: Knock on any volunteer fire department door in the county during an emergency like Tuesday's storm, and inside the scene and conversation would be similar to that depicted in this story about the Boulder Creek volunteers.

By MARK BERGSTROM
Sentinel Staff Writer

BOULDER CREEK — It was the 27th call of the storm, and despite being up and out all night in the driving rain and howling wind, Boulder Creek volunteers

Leo Kuhnlein, Richard Guglielmino and Jack Kunz jumped up and ran toward the fire truck.

Tim West scribbled down the address of the call, Riverside Grove, and followed them out.

The four volunteers say they joined the department not for the glamor of battling flames or the daring of saving lives, but by a desire "to help our neighbors."

It's best that's their philosophy for the call they were headed to was a report of tree limbs down across power lines.

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A dirty job

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Clearing fallen trees and limbs from roadways and waiting for hours in the pouring rain for harried PG&E crews to arrive to cut the juice to the fallen power lines, however, has become their responsibility.

Bud Tomlin, who has been a Boulder Creek volunteer since 1957 and fire chief since 1970, says the original purpose of the department was to fight fires.

But, through the years, "people have demanded more and we have encouraged it. We wanted to be the ones to go in an emergency," he explains.

Today, Boulder Creek firefighters are the "first in" on just about every kind of emergency in the mountain community.

They still fight fires, but also treat accident victims (many of them tourists just passing through on Highway 9), rush heart patients to the hospital and "yes," says Tomlin, even do law enforcement on occasion.

Because of the severity of the storm and the tenuous conditions in his community, Tomlin, too, was at the fire station all day Tuesday.

He was more than donating his time, he was working out of his own pocket for he had to hire a substitute to take his mail route. He says he has to call in a sub for his route more than a dozen

times a year.

Tomlin receives a small stipend as chief and the 32 volunteers receive \$2 per call up to a maximum of \$650 per year. "More than half the men get the maximum; after that they're donating their services," he explains.

Just because his men are volunteers, Tomlin does not expect less than a city chief does of his paid firefighters.

The Boulder Creek volunteers go through the same fire science program at Cabrillo College and then are required to attend a weekly, two-hour training drill. Volunteers are told when they join that they'll be expected to keep pace with the latest fire science technology.

The demands on the volunteers' time and energy grow every year. For the statistic-gathering year ended Nov. 1, Boulder Creek volunteers responded to 632 calls, not counting 104 calls during the Jan. 3-5 disaster.

There seems to be no complaint. There is virtually no turnover of volunteers and the department has 16 names on the waiting list.

There is a growing demand for service during daytime hours, and since the volunteers hold down jobs, the department counts on the cooperation of employers.

Most employers don't dock the volunteers when they're called away from the

job for an hour or so and, in turn, there's an agreement among the firemen that they'll return to work quickly if not needed at the scene of the emergency. "There may be a time when they are needed and we don't want to burn out the employers," says Tomlin.

Like other fire department's, most of Boulder Creek's calls are for medical emergencies. Sixty-eight percent were medical emergencies last year.

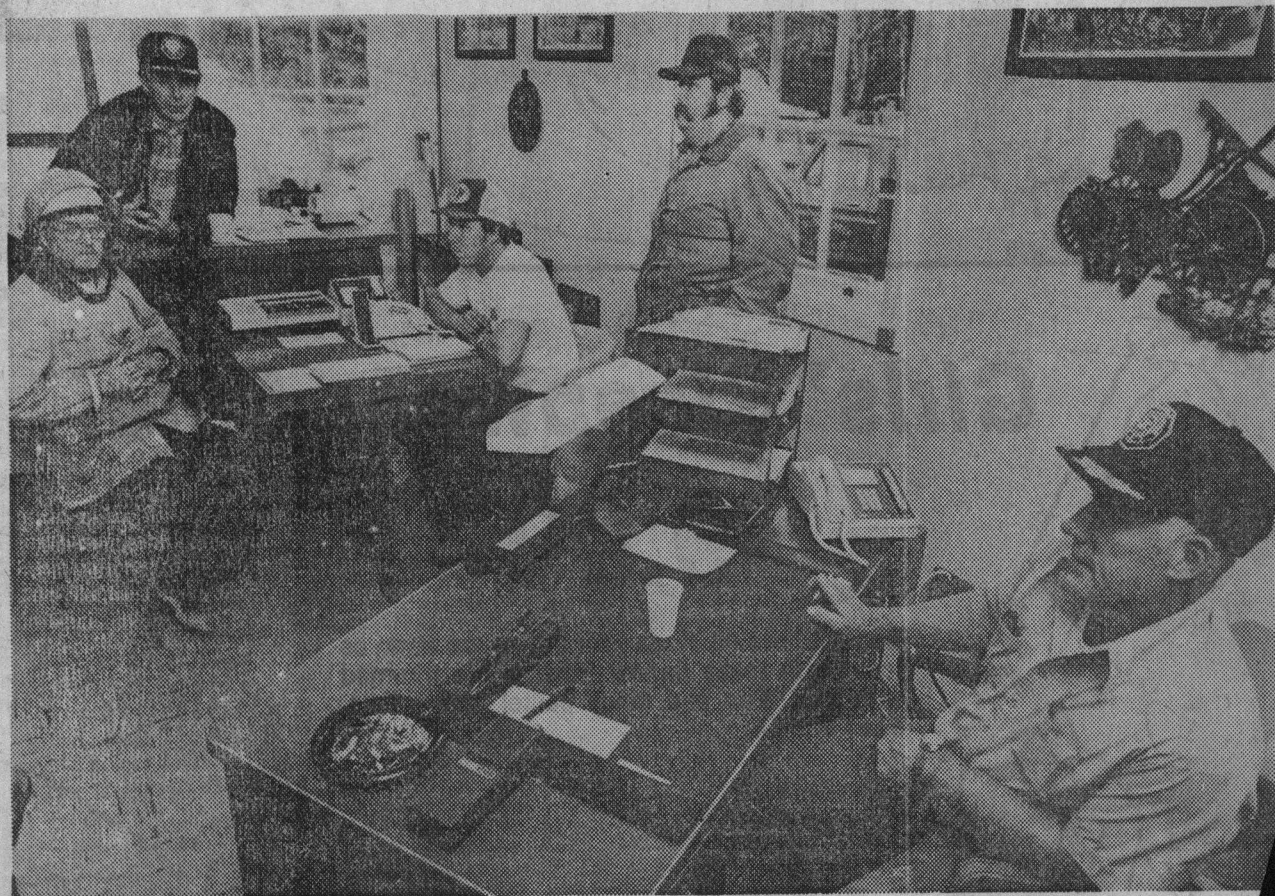
Most of the Boulder Creek volunteers are Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), having completed the same 104-hour course as ambulance crews and paid firefighters.

Volunteers must complete that training (on their own time) to serve on the rescue squad. That's an honor in the department and an incentive for the volunteers to become EMTs. So far, 16 of the 32 volunteers are EMTs and six more are attending classes.

Racing out at 3 o'clock in the morning to cut a mangled accident victim out of a twisted car seems more of a grim job one would just as soon leave to someone else to do.

Yet, the Boulder Creek volunteers do that routinely and without hesitation.

"You never know who the call is for," says Tomlin. "That's what keeps us going."



WAITING: Leo Kuhnlein, Richard Guglielmino, Tim West, Jack Kunz and Chief Bud Tomlin.