

Central Fire: the unknown district

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SOQUEL — The Central Fire District doesn't have an identity crisis. The fire-fighters know who they are.

The problem is, they're not sure everybody else does.

The issue was raised recently by one of the residents of the district, who noticed that the red paint on the curb in front of a neighborhood fire hydrant had worn off, and cars were parking there.

"We live in Santa Cruz Gardens. I am unable to find the phone number or address for the Live Oak Fire Department which I think is the one that services our area," the woman wrote in a letter addressed to the Central Fire District. "Please let the Live Oak Department know this information or alert whoever does curb painting in our neighborhood," she wrote.

The Live Oak Fire Department has not existed since 1982, when it merged with Soquel to form the Central Fire District. Capitola joined in 1987.

The letter is even more of a public-relations nightmare because Central has

a station on Thurber Lane, right in the middle of Santa Cruz Gardens.

Troubled that there might be a big problem, Chief Steve Negro decided to do an informal poll last weekend at the Capitola Mall, where Central Fire was participating in a Home Fair. Dressed in full uniform, Negro stopped shoppers and asked if they knew which was their fire department. "The first six people I talked to said either Live Oak, Soquel or Capitola," Negro said Wednesday.

The problem is not life-threatening because all anybody needs to do in an emergency is call 911 for help. The operator matches the address with the proper fire department. "You end up with a front yard full of fire trucks. Nobody looks at the name on the side," Negro said.

But, he said, the district provides other services such as issuing burning permits and providing important fire-safety information.

Negro worries that lack of name recognition could hamper the district's efforts to pass Measure B, a Proposition 4 spending-limit override, on the June 5 ballot.

More than 100 fire districts in the

state have easily passed such overrides, which do not involve tax increases. Scotts Valley, for example, won approval several years ago by a 92 percent "yes" vote.

Central Fire officials fear its voters might skip over the measure if they don't think it pertains to them.

In an effort to spread the word, the district is mailing out fluorescent-green fliers, listing pertinent facts about the district and the locations of the four fire stations.

Negro believes the problem has arisen because of the tremendous growth in the district since the merger. "People move in and just assume their fire department has the same name as their mailing addresses," he said.

The name "Central" was chosen rather than Live Oak-Soquel in 1982 because it was anticipated that Capitola would join, Negro said.

He said district directors first tried to find some kind of name that would historically link the areas and found one, Arroyo de Rancho Rodeo, on an old Mexican land deed.

That, they thought would be too unwieldy and perhaps a little highfalutin'.



Chief Steve Negro

The decision came down to Mid-County Fire or Central Fire. Directors chose, um... er... Central.