

# Everybody Pitches In To Help Scotts Valley Fire Department

By Margaret Koch

When the big fire siren sends out its hoarse call of distress, everybody in Scotts Valley stops to listen.

And before the echoes have finished bouncing back off the hills, phones are ringing and things are happening.

A couple of grocers shed their white aprons.

A service station owner calls for his wife to finish gasing a car.

At a lumber mill a worker snaps the "off" switch on the big saw. In still another mill office a bookkeeper drops his ball-point pen on a page of half-finished entries and dashes out. A carpenter working on a new home puts down his hammer; a painter, his wet brush, and a construction company truck driver yells for a co-worker to deliver a waiting load of sand and gravel.

Then men who work closest to it, go directly to the Scotts Valley Volunteer Firehouse. There they start up the equipment and roar off down—or up—Highway 17 with sirens shrieking and red lights flashing.

Volunteers who may be working in the area where the fire has broken out, go directly to it in their own cars after receiving a call from the five-phone hookup operated by valley people.

Scotts Valley fire district is one of the largest volunteer fire districts in the county—and one of the meanest. Its area stretches like a giant rubber band from Camp Evers down Glen Canyon road to Branciforte drive; across to Pasatiempo, up Graham Hill road and across below Mount Hermon; then north on Bean Creek road to where it branches east through heavy timber to cross Highway 17 and plunge straight down into Glenwood basin.

Tall redwoods march up and down steep slopes which are broken here and there with great patches of almost impenetrable brush. It is dry as tinder. It is steep as Billy-hell, in the words of one old-timer. And this time of year it is an explosion waiting to happen.

An explosion can be a spark from an exhaust, a single smoldering match, or a wisp of smoke curling up from beneath a piece of broken glass in the dry leaves. They start small but they don't stay that way long.

"If we get a call early enough we can usually control the fire," explained Fire Chief Carl Taylor.

If they don't, it can be a different story. That's why the district, which was re-organized in 1957, now has a five-phone alarm system. A few years back there was just one phone, a re-converted dump truck known as "old faithful," and a few regulars like Lloyd Ragan, "B" Erba and L. S. "Pop" Dixon to answer the calls.

Today there are 32 trained firemen organized into day and night crews, with one man sleeping in

## Big Pumper Shows Its Stuff



the firehouse during the dangerous summer-season months.

"We also have plans for expansion," Taylor pointed out. "We have some good equipment now and hardly any place to keep it."

Plans are being drawn for a new, larger firehouse to be built this fall near the site of the present one. The district also has acquired another site at the junction of Highway 17 and Sims road where an auxiliary firehouse will be built and will be manned by Pasatiempo volunteers. There are now five fire commissioners: Don Benjamin, C. R. Roberson, Gene Scarborough, Moreland Johnson and "Pop" Dixon, whose wife, Gladys, serves as commission secretary.

In its struggle to keep up with changing times and a rapidly expanding population growth, the department has had to add to its equipment. The old 500-gallon

pump truck was just a "spit in the eye" against a big fire. A completely renovated big pumper that can deliver more than 2000 gallons was recently purchased through the efforts of Chief Ranger Les Gum of the Felton State Forestry division, Col. Donald Gates of the local civil defense department and Santa Cruz County Supervisor Robert Burton.

Equipment in the valley now includes one small "rush truck" with a water capacity of 150 gallons, two pumpers that deliver 600 and 650 gallons apiece, and the two large tankers that handle more than 2000 gallons apiece. In addition to this "big stuff," the volunteers have acquired two special smoke masks and back tanks for entering burning buildings; back tanks for brush fires; one atomic fall-out counter and a complete resuscitation outfit.

One week after the resuscitation equipment arrived, a call came in

from a valley motel where a woman was smothering with an acute asthma attack.

"We helped her breathe until a doctor could get there," recalled Fireman Iverson Fitchie.

Another call several months ago involved a heart attack.

"One life saved, more than pays for the equipment," noted Gladys Dixon.

The newest big tanker got a thorough baptism on the Mount Umunhum fire where it delivered thousands of gallons of water to state forest service trucks.

Things have quieted down a bit since then. Last week a bulldozer at Bethany park tipped over and caught fire; a valley home roof sprouted flames when its fireplace threw out too many sparks. Small, routine jobs like these.

"Just remember — the small ones can get big in a hurry with everything as dry as it is," warned Chief Taylor.

"Showing what it can do" is the big, 2000-gallon pumper recently acquired by Scotts Valley volunteer fire district. The pump got its baptism on the Mount Umunhum fire where it supplied the smaller State Forest service trucks with water. Watching the demonstration are (from left) Chief Ranger Les Gum of Felton State Forestry division; Gene Scarborough, C. R. Roberson, Supervisor Robert Burton, Col. Donald Gates, Scotts Valley Fire Chief Carl Taylor and "Pinky" Pedemonte.

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