

A TOTAL DISASTER

Fire & Fire Prevention - Jedd

Breaking news and photos from the fire, www.santacruzsentinel.com

- Fire only 25 percent contained
- Investigators pinpoint fire's origin
- Cool temps today could aid fight

5-24-08

By JENNIFER SQUIRES
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

CORRALITOS — An empty lot near the Santa Cruz-Santa Clara county line appears to be the source of the Summit Fire, according to Cal Fire investigators who say the 3,200-acre wild-fire may not be fully contained until Wednesday.

The blaze grew slightly Friday, burning "deep inside the fire line on some steep hillsides," Cal Fire spokesman Dave Shew said. "People aren't going to see much anymore but it's there."

Still, authorities are unsure when evacuated residents will be allowed back in to see if their homes survived the devastating wildfire that sparked early Thursday.

"It's going to take quite a while to mop this up," Shew said late Friday.

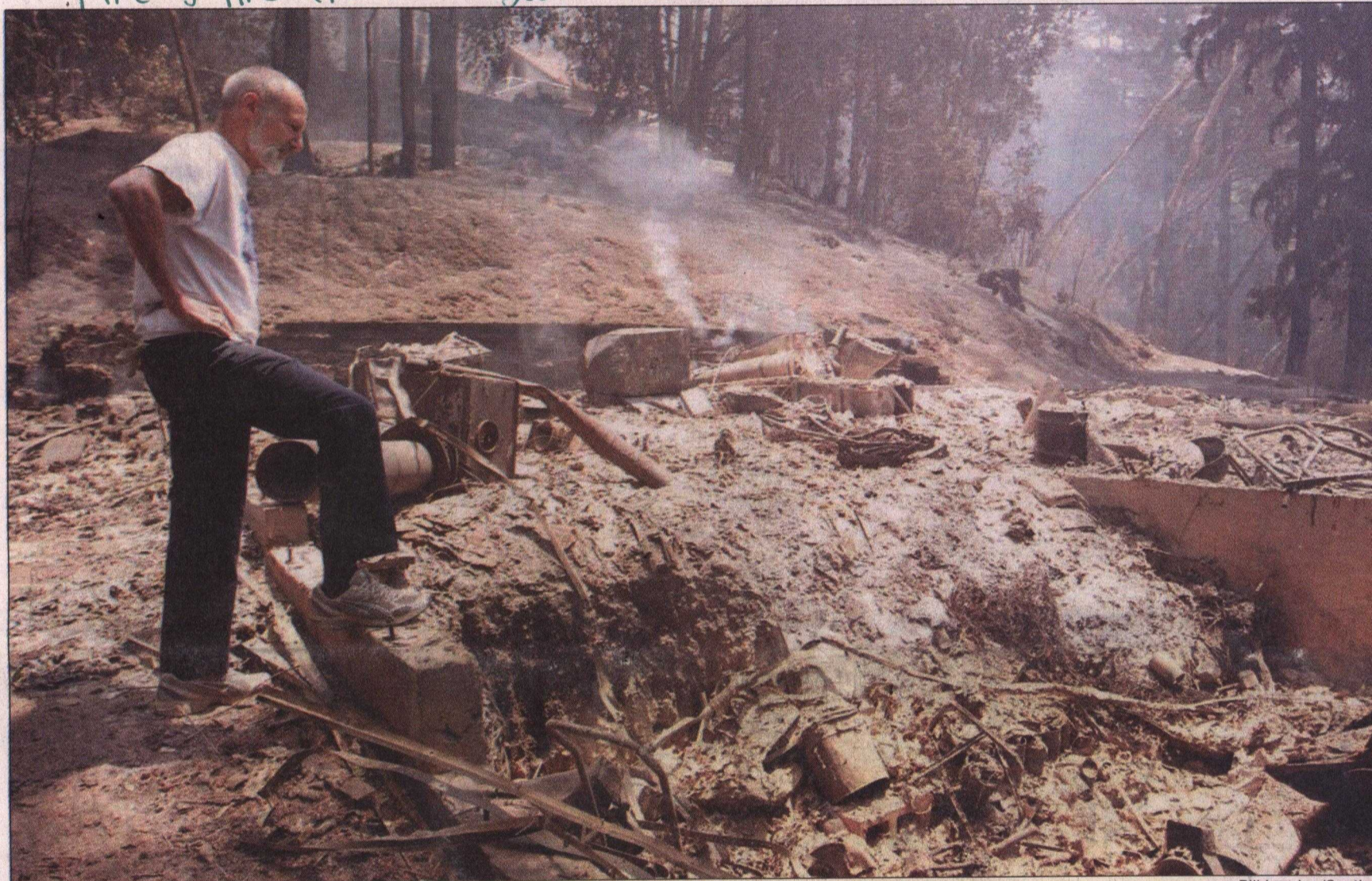
Friday's weather assisted firefighters.

"It was cooler and the winds weren't as bad, so that certainly was a help," Shew said, adding that the slight chance of rain today and cool temperatures could give fire crews even more advantage over the flames. "It's going to allow us to have people on the ground. It helps us button this thing down even quicker."

The fire was 25 percent contained Friday evening — crews were still snuffing out small spot fires along Summit Road

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

See FIRE on PAGE A6



Bill Leland examines the remains of his Dove Lane home Friday afternoon.

On Dove Lane, fire was hit and miss

By J.M. BROWN
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

CORRALITOS — Wearing green gardening gloves, Bill Leland sorts through the pile of ashes that used to be his study.

He's looking for 30-year-old wooden toys that once belonged to his four children, who he hoped would someday pass the cherished playthings along to his four grandchildren.

But little in his idyllic camp-style house on Dove Lane survived Thursday's raging Summit Fire, except for a wood-burning stove that once warmed his living room and the metal

rings that formed the core of his redwood-encased hot tub. He mourns the loss of priceless family pictures and personal papers.

"I know we'll move on from that," he said Friday, which marked the first time he was able to fully survey the damage since the 3,200-acre fire sent him and hundreds of other mountain residents fleeing. "The challenge is staying with that sadness while knowing that I'm very fortunate."

A tiny cluster of homes about eight miles into Eureka Can-

See DOVE LANE on PAGE A5



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Justin Petersen from Cal Fire in Tulare hoses down some hot spots along Summit Road on Friday morning.

First wave of fire crews get much-needed rest

By GENEVIEVE BOOKWALTER
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

CORRALITOS — Fresh-faced firefighters were a welcome sight to their weary counterparts on the Summit Fire on Friday, as crews from around the state relieved many who had battled the blaze for more than 24 hours without sleep.

Firefighters were exhausted Friday morning, as those first to arrive on the fire lines Thursday were finally relieved from their posts. Many said the effort to put out the blaze was all-consuming.

"You just try to stay focused.

You know what your objectives are. Sometimes you can hear the crackling of the fire all night so it's hard to sleep," said firefighter Jeremy Gilbert with Aptos/La Selva Fire Protection District, who wrapped up a 24-hour shift in Eureka Canyon on Friday morning. "It's so intense out there I don't think you can feel tired."

Cal Fire firefighter John Selfridge, 23, of St. Helena was one of those stepping off the fire line about 10 a.m. Friday, after clearing brush from around homes high in the Santa Cruz Moun-

See CREWS on PAGE A18

Staff acts fast to evacuate Corralitos senior home

By **CONAN KNOLL**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

CORRALITOS — The first thing Tryg Thorensen noticed while going to work at 7:30 a.m. Thursday was all the smoke.

He grew concerned when he saw it billowing down Eureka Canyon where the care facility he owns houses 14 seniors with varying levels of dementia. The area around the facility, De Un Amor, was lit with an eerie orange glow.

"The closer I got in, the more I realized, 'This is right on top of us,'" he said.

At 10 a.m. a fire marshal stopped by and told Thorensen there could be a mandatory evacuation for the home,

which sits on 11 acres about a mile and a half from the Corralitos Market. Thorensen, who learned about how fickle fire can be as a kid during Southern California wildfires, decided not to wait.

He and his staff began preparing to move the seniors out of harm's way before the order to evacuate eventually was handed down.

"He never did give us the mandatory order to leave, but you know with Mother Nature and those winds," said Thorensen, explaining why he decided to act.

He dashed to the Comfort Inn in Freedom and rented enough rooms to house the residents and several members of his staff.

"We just started grabbing whatever we needed for the residents — clothes

and undergarments for them and medications, that was the No. 1 thing, and their documentation," De Un Amor administrator Maricela Fletes said.

They collected the two dogs and a cat that live on the property, the residents ate lunch and everybody left by 12:30 p.m.

The staff evacuated 13 residents on their own. The 14th resident was taken home by family.

"We had just enough room in our cars to do it without requiring assistance from the outside," Thorensen said.

The official order to evacuate came later in the day.

Residents and staff spent Thursday night at the Comfort Inn, but there was more work to be done Friday.

Thorensen had to find a new location for the residents because the hotel was booked due to the Watsonville Fly-In and the holiday weekend. He secured 10 rooms at the Holiday Inn in Watsonville for Friday.

"We're waiting another day until this gets more under control. I just don't want to take any chances," Thorensen said Friday.

Jea Greenhalgh, whose mother stays at De Un Amor, lives nearby but was unable to help with the evacuation Thursday because the road was closed. She was grateful for the staff's efforts.

"It just shows me how they handle them on a daily basis," she said. "My mother herself said they did a really wonderful job."

Thorensen said he was proud with

how everyone at the facility pulled together to take care of the residents.

"The residents are doing very, very well," Fletes said. "They're just doing wonderful. The caregivers are great. This is really teamwork."

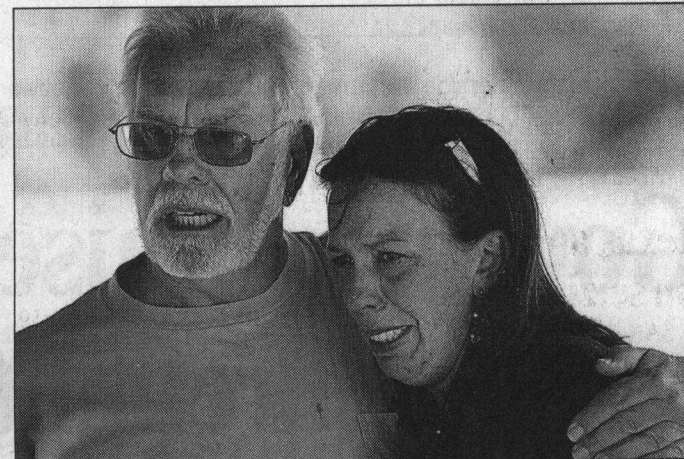
Kathleen Johnson, executive director of Advocacy Inc., which oversees residential care facilities for the county, praised the evacuation as "an exemplary model" of how to handle such an emergency.

"It was smooth and well done and planned ahead," she said. "It's a good example of being effective and efficient while being caring and concerned about the residents."

Contact Conan Knoll at 706-3252 or cknoll@santacruzsentinel.com.

'Ben, I don't know if you've heard about your place, but I think it's toast.'

DAN CARTER INFORMING BEN ADAMS ABOUT HIS HOME



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

ABOVE: Ben Adams and his daughter Kathy Rich react after getting a phone call from neighbor Dan Carter, who told them their home was destroyed.

LEFT: Dan Carter, a property owner on Ormsby Cutoff Road, calls his neighbor Ben Adams on Friday to inform him that his home is destroyed after Carter slipped past road closures on his motorcycle to see his property.

Fire by the numbers

ACRES BURNED: 3,200.

CONTAINED: 25 percent, as of 7 p.m. Friday.

STRUCTURES DESTROYED: At least 17 homes and 11 outbuildings.

COST TO FIGHT FIRE: \$1.72 million.

INJURIES: None reported.

FIREFIGHTERS: 2,683.

EQUIPMENT: 259 engines, two air tankers, 13 helicopters, 54 bulldozers and 37 water tenders.

FIRE STARTED: In an empty lot in the woods along Summit Road, shortly before Maymen's Flat, at mile marker 7.53. The cause is under investigation.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The garage at 715 Ormsby Cutoff Road is the only structure left standing from more than a dozen homes.

Fire

Continued from Page A1

and near Eureka Canyon Road. Flames jumped the fire line drawn at Ramsey Gulch Road Friday morning heading toward Hazel Dell Road. Sheriff's deputies asked folks throughout the areas of South Green Valley Road, Casserly Road, Smith Road and Mount Madonna Road to develop plans to move their livestock, extra vehicles and valuable property.

"We're concerned the fire is going to jump south and west," Sheriff Steve Robbins said.

The area in jeopardy is home to a number of ranches, orchards and rural properties, as well as a couple of schools and a golf course.

Back through Eureka Canyon, where the fire ripped through hard and fast, roadblocks didn't stop some people from checking on their property.

Dan Carter, who owns 30 acres on Ormsby Cutoff Road, rode his dirt bike along Summit Road to Ormsby on Friday morning to assess the damage. Before the fire the winding road connecting Eureka Canyon Road and Summit Road was lined with about a dozen homes, some with swimming pools, one even had a lake. But as the sun rose Thursday, all that remained was a lonely garage at 715 Ormsby Cutoff Road.

One-by-one Friday morning Carter phoned his neighbors to give them the bad news: All of their houses had burned to the ground.

"Ben, I don't know if you've heard about your place, but I

think it's toast," Carter said as he surveyed what was left.

The road, which began years ago as firebreak and morphed into a paved road lined with million-dollar homes with an ocean view, has been reduced to burned vegetation, trees and piles of rubble.

"It's so weird looking at everything," Carter said. "You couldn't see through any of this stuff."

The fire, first reported around 5:20 a.m. Thursday on the Santa Clara County side of Summit Road, had scorched almost 100 acres by the time the first engine arrived 20 minutes later.

Fire investigators are still determining what ignited the fire, but they've located where the fire was sparked: an empty lot in the woods along Summit Road, shortly before Maymen's Flat, at mile marker 7.53.

"This is the only area where we are looking," Cal Fire spokesman Jim Pope said.

Planting red, blue and yellow markers, two Cal Fire investigators on Friday tracked the direction of the conflagration to a clearing, closed off by a rusted chain slung between two trees. No other information is available about the site, which is being treated as a crime scene.

Cal Fire officials reported Friday that 17 homes and 11 outbuildings had been destroyed in the blaze. Sheriff's Sgt. Fred Plageman put the number of homes lost closer to 20, including 12-15 on Ormsby, two on Dove Lane and some on the upper portion of Buzzard Lagoon Road. Officials said they are still trying to devise a way to inform residents of damage and loss.

"We have teams of deputies going up there marking the

homes," Robbins said. "We're trying to actually get street addresses or descriptions."

Erin Fischer, who has lived for 20 years seven miles in on Upper Highland Road off Eureka Canyon, said Friday he still didn't know whether his house survived.

He fled at 8 a.m. Thursday, saying, "I had just enough time to pack up, put the dog in the car and leave."

Fischer stayed overnight at the Watsonville Red Cross station at the Fairgrounds, sleeping on a cot. Red Cross authorities said the shelter likely would close this morning after sheltering only 12 people overnight Thursday.

County Animal Services officers and volunteers continued to rescue pets and livestock from the fire zone Friday. Animal Services impounded 142 Thurs-

MANDATORY EVACUATIONS: 350 homes were evacuated at Lower Highland, Buzzard Lagoon, Vaca del Sol, Upper Browns Valley and Avocado, Hazel Dell, Redwood Road/Browns Valley Road. Another 1,500 homes were encouraged to evacuate.

ROAD CLOSURES: Road closures remain in effect in the area of Eureka Canyon Road and the Summit Road area.

VOLUNTEERS: The Volunteer Centers of Santa Cruz County are pre-registering individuals who are interested in providing support in response to the fire. Call 427-5070 or go to www.scvolunteercenter.org to help.

Emergency contact information

EVACUATION INFORMATION: Evacuation facilities set up at Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds, 2601 E. Lake Ave., Watsonville. For evacuation assistance, call 458-7195.

RED CROSS: Staging at Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds, 2601 E. Lake Ave., Watsonville.

ANIMAL SERVICES: Santa Cruz Animal Services helping with large animal evacuations. For information, call 454-7303.

day and another 34 on Friday.

Hundreds of horses and other livestock are being cared for at the Fairgrounds in Watsonville and two private farms in Bonny Doon and Freedom. More than 60 rescued pets were taken to the animal shelters in Scotts Valley and Watsonville.

"We're just doing sweeps of all these areas up here," Animal Services supervisor Todd Stosuy said. "We're just going to keep going until it ends."

Cal Fire and Sheriff's Office officials said they are working on a plan to allow evacuated residents back to their property — possibly by issuing passes to those who can prove they live in the fire zone — and hope to let people in within a couple of days, Shew said.

Cal Fire and county officials are planning a community meeting in Corralitos on Sunday to talk with evacuees and answer questions, but have yet to nail down a time and location.

"We don't want to leave people hanging like this," Shew said. "We know people are anxious to know."

A mandatory evacuation order was issued for 350 homes and a voluntary evacuation affected another 1,500.

On Friday, sheriff's officials gave several informal briefings to people gathered in front of the Corralitos Market. Plageman and Robbins told evacuees about the spread of the fire and tidbits of information about specific roads and mountain communities.

People clustered around to ask about their addresses and those of their neighbors. Some who live on the lower portions of Eureka Canyon Road sighed with relief, but Buzzard Lagoon residents grew more nervous when they heard deputies weren't sure if all the houses on the dirt portion of the road had escaped the flames.

Still, people said it was better to have the update — even if it

included bad news — than to be left in the dark.

"Just knowing helps a lot," said Dawn Hanson, who has lived on Hazel Dell Road for 17 years.

At the urging of her children, Hanson reluctantly left her home Thursday morning, but returned that night to pick up important papers and mementos. She was told Friday the fire had moved south and west toward her neighborhood, but had not jumped the road. Her house seemed to still be safe, she learned.

One family came to Corralitos to confirm their house on Ormsby Cutoff Road was gone.

Carter, the Ormsby property owner who rode into the area on his motorcycle Friday morning, had already phoned Ben Adams with the news. Adams, his daughter Kathy Rich — who lived in the house — and son, Chris Adams of Hollister, looked at photos of their fire-ravaged neighborhood and cried.

Ben Adams, who lives in South San Francisco, tried to comfort his daughter. She fled Thursday morning as flames rolled down the hill toward the house, only taking the possessions she could pile into laundry baskets.

"Everything in the house, we can get on eBay," he told her. "It's just a house."

Ben Adams cleared the land with a little red tractor — the only possession that appeared to survive the blaze — and they installed the drywall during the kids' summer vacations instead of playing at the beach.

Tears slid down Ben Adams' cheeks and he lifted his sunglasses to wipe them away.

"It's something about the devastation," he said. "I don't understand the feelings. I can't put a label on them."

MediaNews contributed to this report.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Fire evacuees wait for news in front of the Corralitos Market Friday afternoon.

Contact Jennifer Squires at 429-2449



Patrick Tehan/MediaNews

Incident commander Joe Waterman briefs Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on the Summit Fire as Santa Cruz County Supervisors Ellen Pirie, right, and Tony Campos, far right, look on. The governor visited firefighters camped at Christmas Hill Park in Gilroy working the Summit Fire.

Governor praises work of state firefighters

By SHANNA MCCORD
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

GILROY — Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, visiting the Summit Fire base camp in Gilroy on Friday, heartily praised the men and women on the front lines of the blaze burning in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

"We have very brave and talented firefighters in California," he said. "They are the most talented and best trained."

Schwarzenegger was joined by county Supervisors Tony Campos and Ellen Pirie, state Sen. Abel Maldonado and Cal Fire Director Ruben Grijalva as he was briefed by fire officials and given a tour of the camp.

He said Thursday's hot, windy weather whipped the fire to a level normally seen in September or October, not spring.

The Summit Fire, which ignited about 5:20 a.m. Thursday, has chewed up 3,200 acres and destroyed nearly 20 homes and 11 outbuildings.

Currently 25 percent under control, the fire is expected to be entirely contained by Wednesday, fire officials said.

Battling the blaze has cost an

estimated \$1.72 million so far, Grijalva said.

The National Guard is also bringing in 12 helicopters and a C-130 tanker with infrared vision to see through the smoke. There already are 2,683 firefighters in 83 crews, 2 airtankers, 10 airplanes, 13 helicopters, 259 engines, 37 water tenders and 54 bulldozers.

Friday's work involved building nine miles of line near Summit Road, Buzzard Lagoon Road, Ramsey Gulch and Mount Madonna Road to stop the fire — located in steep, rugged terrain — from spreading.

The governor said he's pleased with the response from Cal Fire and the local fire agencies called to help.

"I'm satisfied, but am I 100 percent satisfied? No. We always have to shoot for better," Schwarzenegger said. "We need more manpower, we need more aircraft. But we can't be whining about that, we can't be complaining."

Campos, in Sacramento Thursday for an unrelated meeting, met with Schwarzenegger to ask for an emergency declaration for Santa Cruz County.

The declaration allowed for

firefighters to be called in from across the state to assist the effort, and likely will land the county \$100 million from the state for recovery efforts.

Schwarzenegger noted Campos' effort during the press conference.

"This is a very efficient man," the governor said. "He stormed into my office immediately. We did this one in about 27 minutes, a new record."

Pirie said she wants to help residents who've lost their homes in the fire rebuild without being burdened by the county planning process.

She plans to write a letter to her supervisor colleagues asking them to streamline the permit process for fire victims.

"The problem is, a house burns down and rebuilding it means following a new code that could cost more than the house was insured for," Pirie said. "We should bend over backward to help them rebuild and get back into their homes."

Pirie's proposal will be presented at the board's next meeting June 10.

Contact Shanna McCord at 429-2401 or smccond@santacruzsentinel.com.

Dove Lane

Continued from Page A1

yon from Corralitos, Dove Lane is a story of random misfortune reminiscent of tales told after a tornado rips through a Midwestern prairie. Some houses are destroyed, while others are untouched.

Several hundred feet above Leland's home sits the ranch-style house of Janice Chaplain, completely unscathed. Yet, down the lane, a 3,500-square-foot home and outbuildings were razed, leaving owner Hugo Van Zazzara with just rubble to show for the four years he spent building the three-story labor of love by hand.

Some residents had insurance, others didn't. Some had recently trimmed back dry vegetation that acts as fuel for wildfires, but others didn't. Still, the precautionary measures didn't seem to make a huge difference as the blaze tore up the hillside pushed by swirling wind gusting up to 45 mph. It seemed to be pure luck whether a house was saved.

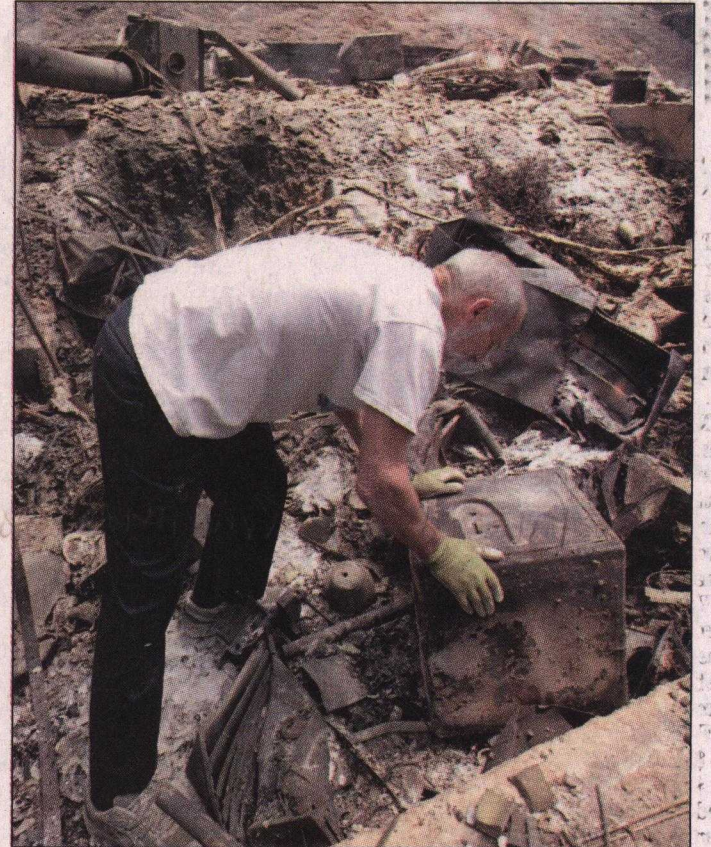
Ormsby Cutoff Road was not as fortunate. Up to 15 high-priced homes with an ocean view along that partially paved road were destroyed. Authorities have yet to report on damage in the other hardest-hit area along Buzzard Lagoon Road.

When Rebecca Henson returned Friday morning to the small cabin on Dove Lane she shares with her 5-year-old Rhodesian ridgeback mix, Sheriff, she was stunned to see their cozy home intact. A line of blackened grass and brush stopped within feet of the house, where firefighters also had cut a fire line around her propane tank.

"They saved it," she said. "God, it's so cool."

All four of the neighbors escaped Thursday after the sunrise fire rolled through the mountains from its origin near Maymen's Flat, off Summit Road. While Leland said he and Chaplain fled about two hours after the 5:20 a.m. blaze started, Van Zazzara and his son tried to fight the encroaching flames with garden hoses for several hours before being forced out by firefighters.

Although 911 dispatchers told her Dove Lane was not under a mandatory evacuation order yet, the 45-year-old Henson decided she should go. But first she had to remove fertilizer



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Bill Leland searches the remains of his Dove Lane home in vain for anything to salvage during a visit to the site Friday.

from her truck to make room for her belongings.

"I spent an hour shoveling chicken (poop) out of the back of my truck," Henson said, laughing as she recalled the panicky exit.

But as the fire roared closer to her home, Henson said she threw down the shovel, put down her coffee cup and said, "I'm out of here."

On Friday, the handle of the shovel lay melted on the grass; her coffee cup sat untouched nearby.

Leland, 67, an agroecology and sustainable food expert at UC Santa Cruz, decided to split once he saw an orange glow emanating from the forest as redwoods shook in the wind just outside his deck.

"It was clear I had to go," he said.

The glass that used to make up the floor-to-ceiling windows in his bedroom lay among the charred ruins as a retaining wall separating his property from Chaplain's house was still smoldering.

"This must have been so hot," he said several times, failing to notice a dozen flame-kissed lemons that lay on the ground near what used to be his lemon tree — another sign of the fire's

selectivity.

Leland, who said he may rebuild, visited the site briefly Thursday night after riding into the canyon with a reporter, but didn't get a close look until riding in with another news team Friday. While gathered with other canyon residents at the Corralitos town square Thursday, he had heard his house was destroyed, but "I just knew I had to see it for me to be able to accept it and move on."

Though Van Zazzara's 33-year-old son, Nathon, saw the devastation after sneaking a ride into the canyon, Van Zazzara said he couldn't bear to see what was left of his Victorian home, which featured stained glass windows from 1893 that were handed down by his great-grandfather. The 54-year-old furniture maker, who carried no insurance on the beauty he modeled after the landmark Chart House restaurant in Los Gatos, said he will live in a trailer for the time being but didn't know where he would end up.

"The only thing worse than losing the house would be moving out of this county," he said.

Contact J.M. Brown at 429-2410 or jbrown@santacruzsentinel.com.

Green Your Business at...

Greenfair Silicon Valley

Make Green - easy.





Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Norm Stevenson of the Lassen-Modoc Cal Fire station is a heavy equipment operator.

Crews

Continued from Page A1

tains since about 10 a.m. the day before.

What was he looking forward to most, now that he could take a break?

"A hot meal," Selfridge said. He was also proud that none of the homes that he and his crew were sent in to protect had burned.

Firefighters from all corners of California drove all day Thursday to fight the Summit Fire, the state's first big blaze of the season.

Many of them, like Selfridge, said they expected to stay hard at work in Santa Cruz County for a while. The state has not yet ramped up its firefighting staff for this summer's fire season, and "there's very few resources to do what a big fire requires," Selfridge said.

An additional 2,200 seasonal

Firefighting Resources

FIREFIGHTERS: 2,683.

FIRE CREWS: 83.

ENGINES: 259.

AIR TANKERS: 2.

HELICOPTERS: 13.

DOZERS: 54.

WATER TENDERS: 37.

SOURCE: Cal Fire

firefighters will join the ranks on June 1. Now, there are about 4,700 permanent Cal Fire firefighters and 4,300 inmate and conservation corps firefighters on staff, according to agency figures.

Selfridge's unshaven face and yellow, fire-resistant suit were covered in a layer of soot and grime on Friday morning. After staying awake more than 24 hours, Selfridge formed his words slowly, and had a distant look in his eyes. He looked like a man in serious need of sleep.

At the corner of Redwood and Hazel Dell roads, firefighter Tache Ludewig, 34, of San Martin, looked the same. About 4 p.m. Friday, his glassy brown eyes peered out from a face smudged with dirt. Ludewig also began work at 10 a.m. Thursday, he said, and only stopped to sleep for four hours on the back of his truck.

Friday afternoon, he was still shuttling 4,000 gallons of water at a time up to firefighters on the line. He and his water tender — a truck with a large water tank on the back — were contracted by Cal Fire to help douse the blaze.

Ludewig said he sucks up the thousands of gallons of water he needs from creeks, streams, lakes or hydrants. Finding water close to the firefighters is crucial, Ludewig said, because without a nearby supply, they could run out before he gets back.

The trickiest part of the Summit Fire, Ludewig said, was

navigating the steep, narrow, windy mountain roads with 33,000 pounds of water sloshing around behind him.

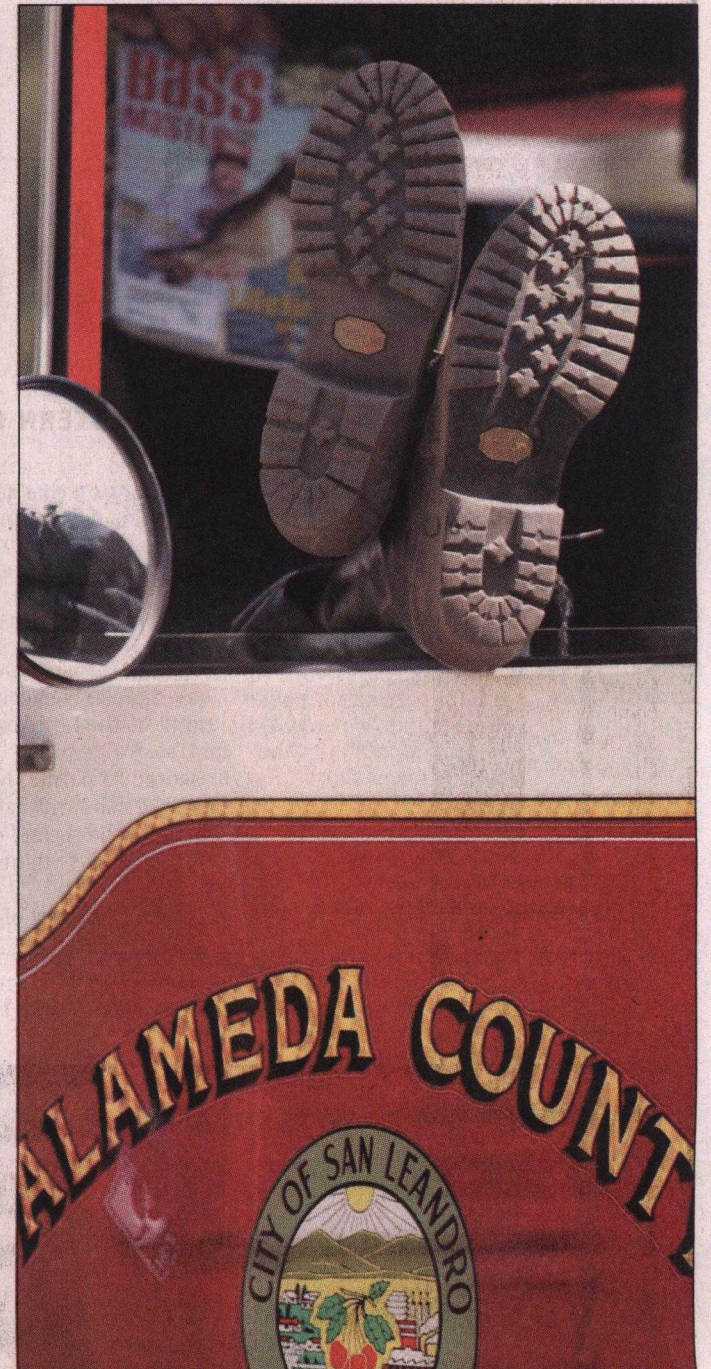
"You get that water moving around these hills, it's kind of nerve-wracking," Ludewig said.

In Corralitos, rested firefighter Norm Stevenson, 46, was parked on Corralitos Road, waiting for orders to move in.

Stevenson said he left snow in Lassen County on Thursday to drive 10 hours with his bulldozer to fight the Summit Fire. He slept in a Watsonville hotel Thursday night and looked forward to scraping vegetation down to bare earth in an effort to stop the flames.

"Nothing gives me more joy than saving people's homes," Stevenson said. His trip south wasn't without personal sacrifice, though.

"My daughter's got a big softball tournament in Stockton this weekend" that Stevenson said he will likely miss. "But that's



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

A firefighter from Alameda County takes a break with a bass fishing magazine at a staging area in Corralitos.

all right, she understands this is my job."

In a nearby parking lot, Santa Cruz Westside resident Matt Mitchell was also ready to hit the fire after spending Thursday night in his engine with fellow members of the Fremont Fire Department.

Mitchell said he saw the Summit Fire's smoke while driving to work on Thursday, and fig-

ured he would soon return to Santa Cruz County.

"I was like, 'Cool, a fire in my hometown,'" Mitchell said. "We're hoping to do something."

Sentinel staff writer Shanna McCord contributed to this report.

Contact G. Bookwalter at 706-3286 or gbookwalter@santacruzsentinel.com.