

VCT FIRES & FIRE PROTECTION

# Project to provide fire-fighting gear goes multinational

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Fire Capt. Jim Dellamonica's pet project is going multinational.

For the past several years, Dellamonica, who works for the Pajaro Valley Fire Protection Agency, has made it his avocation to collect used, surplus and otherwise unwanted fire-fighting and emergency medical equipment and send it to the fire station in the small town of Tigre, Argentina.

Dellamonica, who went to Tigre as part of an international contingent on disaster preparedness and rescue, felt an immediate bond with the fire-fighters at the poverty-stricken station there. Since then, he's managed to scrounge an ambulance, an entire field hospital and scores of medical and fire-fighting supplies for them.

His most recent load, however, went to Silao, Mexico. Dellamonica, and Jeff Tolson, a former Corralitos fire-fighter who is now a captain with the El Dorado County Fire Department, are planning to travel to Silao next week for a ceremony in Dellamonica's honor.

Dellamonica said his connection with the area began when he was approached by a Watsonville fire-fighter and members of the Cruz Roja, Mexico's version of the Red Cross, who wanted to know if he had any supplies that could be sent to Guadalajara for help in the aftermath of the explosion there. As it happened, he had been collecting supplies, mostly medical, for another shipment to Tigre. Dellamonica said he figured the people in Guadalajara needed what he had right away, so he sent it off.

Some time later, Dellamonica was approached by the Cruz Roja again, this time on behalf of the

city of Silao, which is just south of Mexico City. Like Tigre, the town had very little in the way of fire-fighting equipment.

As Dellamonica watched a video tape of the fire-fighters there, he said, "I got the same feeling I got in Tigre...They're out there doing this job and they don't have anything."

So he started putting together a new shipment, this time all fire-fighting gear, and sent it. Dellamonica said it was one of his best loads, because it included protective gear for the fire-fighters and "lots of hardware" for fighting all different kinds of fires. Much of it was surplus from the California Department of Forestry, things the department, under CAL-OSHA regulations, had to replace.

Some of the hardware was broken, but, Dellamonica said, that's really not a problem in Mexico.

"They're very resourceful, they can fix just about anything...I'd imagine everything's on the engines now," he said.

Dellamonica said he's now looking for an engine for Silao — something newer than the 1945 models the station's driving now.

While in Mexico, Dellamonica said he and Tolson are planning to see if they can find a woman they rescued in 1985 when they went to Mexico City to help with rescues following the earthquake there. The woman was pregnant at the time and the rescue itself was very difficult and drew a lot of media attention. Dellamonica and Tolson want to see how she's doing.

Dellamonica said he's also excited about seeing Mexico City eight years later.

"The last time I saw it, it was on the ground," he said.