

SUMMIT FIRE

# Vineyards, ag land mostly spared

*Fire + Fire Protection Dept*  
**More Inside**

■ Residents' appreciation goes a long way for firefighters.  
**PAGE A5**

■ With Summit Fire over, wine festival is a go.  
**PAGE A5**

■ View a map that breaks down how the fire spread.  
**PAGE A8**

By **JENNIFER SQUIRES**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

**CORRALITOS** — Hills scorched by the Summit Fire loom two ridges over from Judy and Jim Schultze's chardonnay vines, a constant reminder of how close the proprietors of Windy Oaks Estate Vineyards and Winery came to losing the 15 acres of wine grapes they planted on their Hazel Dell Road property.

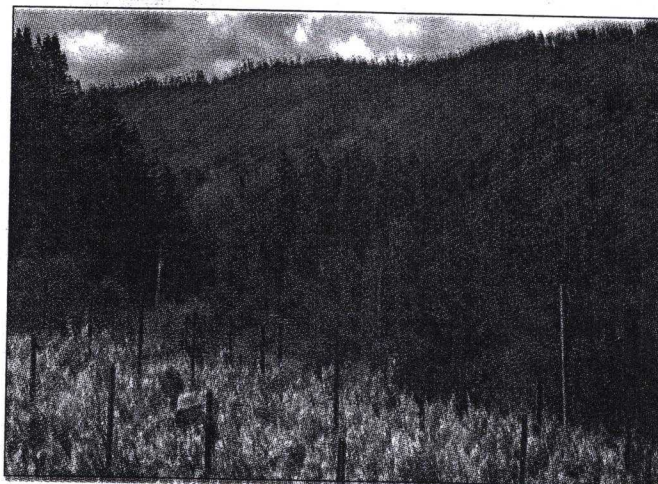
"We were really lucky," Jim Schultze said. "If we'd had another

day of wind, I don't want to think about it."

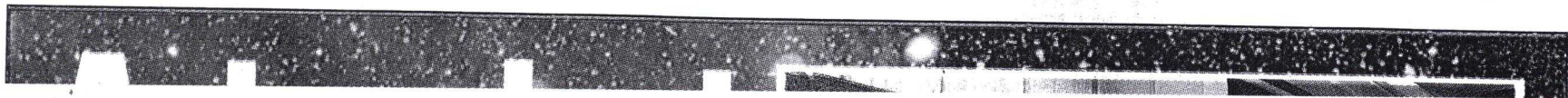
The Schultzes weren't the only growers to escape fire damage when the 4,300-acre Summit Fire ripped through trees and underbrush Thursday morning, burning 31 homes and 63 outbuildings to the ground in the ensuing days.

"It was up on the Summit, so it seemed it missed the ag land," said Ken Corbishley, the county agricultural commissioner. "We're

See **FIRE** on **PAGE A8**



Scorched land is visible as Jim and Judy Schultze walk through their chardonnay vines on Hazel Dell Road Wednesday. Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel



## Fire

Continued from Page A1

still trying to confirm that with people we know — growers and ranchers — in the area. I've yet to have anyone tell me they were affected."

There was very little agriculture land inside the fire zone, but at least one cattle rancher near Mount Madonna brought in equipment to build fire lines around his herd, according to Corbishley.

One small vineyard on the Summit not far from where the fire sparked on Maymen's Flat Road was destroyed by the fire, according to reports. About 20 acres of chardonnay and pinot noir grapes at Kenneth Kim Vineyard were consumed by flames, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

Kenneth Kim could not be reached to comment Wednesday and area winemakers said they did not know Kim.

Several hundred acres of managed forest land also were damaged in the blaze, which Cal Fire said was fully contained Tuesday evening, six days after the wind-driven inferno ignited.

"We had a fair amount of land get burned," said David Van Lennep, a forester with Redwood Empire, a San Jose-based timber company.

About 500 acres of Redwood Empire timber land in Ramsey Gulch — near the southern edge of the blaze — caught fire. Van Lennep said company officials had yet to determine the severity of the damage.

"Of that acreage, some of it was chaparral and knob pine that burned almost completely — moonscape," Van Lennep said, adding that fire-resistant redwoods grew in other areas of the burn. "I have high hopes that the large, mature trees we left in the harvests will be OK."

Big Creek Lumber Co. also manages two sites — one near Mount Madonna School, the other in Eureka Canyon — totaling about 300 acres, according to company forester Janet Webb. She said they think some of the property burned, but have not assessed the damage.

Firefighters on Wednesday were left hunting for hot spots in

a blaze that did more than half of its damage in its first five hours on Thursday.

On high ridges and deep canyons in the Santa Cruz Mountains, firefighters have built a 13-mile circle to isolate a fire that has cost more than \$12.2 million to fight. It continues to burn in small spots on steep ridge lines along Summit Road but is no longer threatening structures, according to Cal Fire.

"Our job is 25 percent putting out flames — and 75 percent mopping up," said strike leader Steve Spinharney as he supervised a crew along Eureka Canyon, near Corralitos. "It's grunt work. But it's important."

The work will continue for about a week.

"When we leave, there is absolutely no chance at all that it can start again," said Spinharney, based in San Benito and Monterey counties.

Fire investigators won't comment on what may have started the blaze, which they have traced to just off Summit Road about a half-mile northwest of Maymen's Flat.

Andrew Napell, who owns land in the area where firefighters believe the fire started, said he had a permit to burn on Mount Madonna Road early last month.

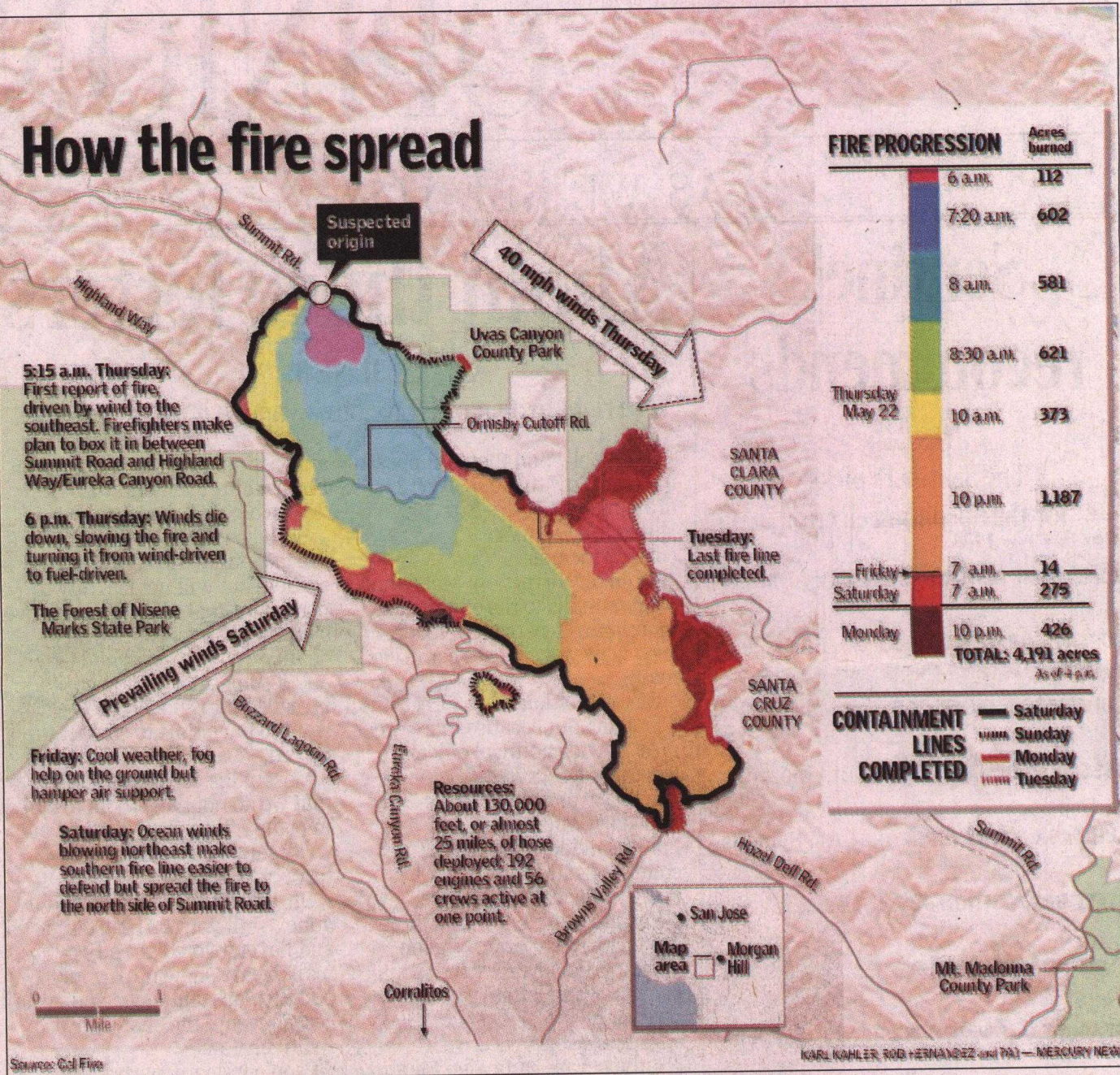
"All land clearing and hazard reduction fire activity on my Mount Madonna property ceased on April 4, 2008," he said. "I am currently working with arson investigators. I have been requested not to comment any further."

But residents who live nearby say the piles of brush burning several weeks ago were huge and it's likely embers had been smoldering for weeks when high winds sparked the Summit Fire.

"They were burning these huge piles of brush, big giant stumps from trees. I think they thought they were out and they weren't," said Barry Wothers, who lives about two miles from where the fire started.

Cal Fire spokesman David Shew said investigators have heard those concerns from residents.

"But that doesn't mean that's what caused this," Shew said. "To simply jump to a conclusion and say that's what started



this is inappropriate. The only way to do that is to look at all the possibilities, and eliminate everything else."

In this deep wooded canyon, an eerie sense of serenity has returned. Singing birds flit from tree to tree, above the ashes. The air smells sweeter. Roads reopened Tuesday to residents, and schools started again.

Grape growers with vines just down the hill from the fire zone said they felt lucky their property had been spared and that the blaze wasn't larger, "but you have to feel really bad for the

people who lost their houses," Schultze said.

The Schultzes were one of the growers closest to the fire.

"It stopped about one half-mile from our property," he said. "We would see trees exploding and flames. At night it was quite a show."

Windy Oaks Estate lies inside the voluntary evacuation zone but the Schultzes chose to stay during the fire. Schultze said they figured that if flames roared onto their land, they could hunker down on a two-acre plot that had been cleared of vegetation

in preparation for planting.

Just down the hill at Bargetto Winery's estate, the vines were not in imminent danger, but the fire affected work in the vineyard, according to vintner John Bargetto.

"The smoke was just pouring over our vineyard to the ocean," he said. "The smoke was so heavy we had to send our workers home."

Ash also fell in many of the areas downwind from the fire, including Windy Oaks Estate.

Corbishley, the agriculture commissioner, said state offi-

cials have tested the ash and found it's not toxic enough to create a food safety issues. The Summit Fire largely burned organic matter, not buildings, which likely explains why the ash doesn't appear to be dangerous, he said.

"The information I received is that they don't believe there was much concern out there," Corbishley said.

MediaNews contributed to this report.

Contact Jennifer Squires at 429-2449 or jsquires@santacruzsentinel.com.