

## LOCKHEED FIRE



Firefighters burn sections of wilderness off Molino Creek Farm Road Tuesday to widen their fire line, protect the Molino Creek Farm community and keep any potential flare-ups from jumping across Warnella Road. DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

# A sense of relief

Evacuation lifted for all but 20 residents

By CATHY KELLY

ckelly@santacruzsentinel.com

**LAST CHANCE** — Home sweet home.

The vast majority of more than 2,000 people displaced by the Lockheed Fire have returned home, except for about 20 residents of the Warnella and Blodgett roads area, where a half-dozen homes are still threatened.

At 7 p.m. Tuesday, the county's largest blaze in 60 years was 80 percent contained and had burned 7,163 acres, Cal Fire reported.

Monday night, evacuation orders were lifted for the hardy folks who live in the Swanton and Last Chance communities. Meetings to update residents on the fire and recovery efforts are set for tonight and Thursday.

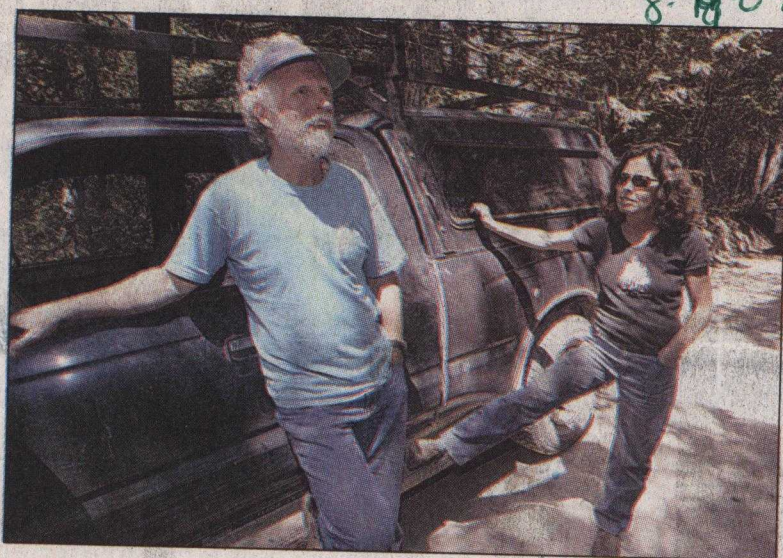
On Tuesday, there was a sense of relief in the area, Cal Fire Battalion Chief Julie Hutchinson said.

"There were a lot of tears and a lot of people stopping and just thanking us," she said. "You can see the relief on them; they're back home and their homes are OK."

Doug Rowe and Morning Star have lived off Last Chance Road for almost 40 years, the couple said Tuesday, as they headed out to retrieve their horses from a friend's place in Felton.

And while Rowe heeded the evacuation order early Thursday, taking two horses, four cats and a dog, Morning Star stayed to "keep an eye on things," direct firefighters and water gardens, she said.

The off-the-grid community is about five miles down a dirt road, from Swanton Road, and about an hour drive from Santa Cruz, Morning Star said. Normally, there is a locked gate on the



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Doug Rowe and Morning Star head back down the hill from their Last Chance Road home to collect their horses they evacuated before the Lockheed Fire drove them out last Thursday.

**ALSO INSIDE:** Biologists hope fire gives new life to rare plants, B2

head of Last Chance Road, near a group of mailboxes, where posted notices offer oat hay for sale and announce a community barn dance.

And while frightening flames covered surrounding ridges a few days ago, the fire was nowhere in sight Tuesday.

The couple got about 20 calls of help after the fire broke out, Morning Star said.

"We were so fortunate; it feels really great," she said. "We're glad to still have all this."

One of their neighbors, Tad Jones, chose to evacuate only to a nearby hilltop, where he could see an "awesome" display of flames across the valley.

Jones, 62, wrote on a notebook he carries, and stated that

## IF YOU GO

LOCKHEED FIRE UPDATE

**DAVENPORT, SWANTON AND LAST CHANCE**

**WHEN:** 6:30 p.m. today

**WHERE:** Pacific Elementary School, 50 Ocean St., Davenport

**BONNY DOON**

**WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. Thursday

**WHERE:** Bonny Doon Elementary School, Multipurpose Room, 1492 Pine Flat Road

has not spoken since 1976, after he met Baba Hari Dass and went into the woods to practice silence. Dass is a silent monk who inspired Mount Madonna Center.

SEE FIRE ON B10



## FIRE

Continued from B1

"My neighbor came and told me about the mandatory evacuation so I drove one of his extra cars to the top of this hill and watched," he wrote. "After a few hours, I watched the flames go along the opposite ridge and by early morning the wind was blowing it away."

Jones, a Vietnam veteran who sports a long white beard, said his cat got its first car ride that night. He only laughed and shook his head when asked the cat's name.

But things were back to normal almost Tuesday, and Jones didn't plan any trips aside from his monthly foray into town for supplies.

Elsewhere in the nearby mountains, fire crews were still at work.

The stubborn fifth of the fire is in rugged terrain between Molino Creek and Warnella Road, Hutchinson said.

"It's too steep for hand crews and we haven't been able to create a line, so we are trying to fire it out and bring it down to the dozer line; that will give us that 20 percent," she said. "We have made some progress but are trying to do it good and slow."

Full containment is estimated for Thursday, she said.

Smoke was heavy at the 136-acre Molino Creek Farm collective Tuesday, off Warnella Road, as firefighters monitored a controlled blaze that was backing slowly down into a canyon, into the wind. More than 20 firefighters stood with shovels and other tools in hand, ringing a home atop a ridge, watching the burn and making sure it didn't jump the line. A field of crops sat in a smoky valley on the other side of the home.

Resident Sheri Sobin said she did not evacuate but that about half of her neighbors did, and were still awaiting word that it was safe to return.

Sobin was checking on some "smoke tomatoes" and wondering if she could get to Wednesday's farmer's market, but it looked doubtful as workers had not been able to get the 4 1/2 miles up from Highway 1 to pick them.

In the first few hours of the blaze, Sobin had watched flames engulf a ridge and hillside near her home and said she called for help and that 10 engines arrived pretty quickly.

The home has a good supply of water and they cleared brush from around it, she said.

"All my days of weed whacking and chiropractors and acupuncturists have paid off," Sobin said. "We always feared a fire and unfortunately it takes

a fire to get the work done to prevent a fire.

"It's dramatic, and it was scary Thursday, but these guys have all been so calm and helpful and polite."

The organic farm is off the grid and accessed by one narrow dirt road. Hot shot rounds, fired from a gun-like tool to start fires

in hard-to-reach areas, rang out Tuesday at the burn area, sounding like gunfire.

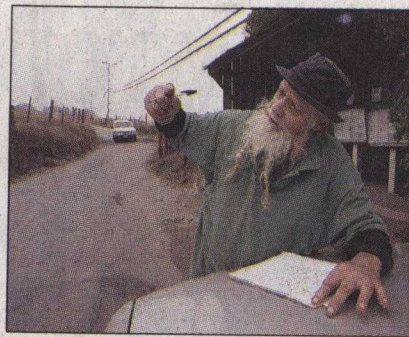
They are used to "build depth in the edge firing operation," a Cal Fire captain calmly explained.

"We are just firing out," Capt. Bill Weiser said. "The fire is hung up in these drainages."

It was burning pretty good, he said, despite the lingering fog.

Hutchinson, who is based in Riverside County in Southern California, said the weather had been a big help since Saturday.

"It's actually been a little cold," she said, quickly adding that she was not complaining.



Tad Jones, who has lived on Last Chance Road for 20 years, stayed with his home throughout the Lockheed Fire.

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL