



NEWS



News Headlines 12/29/2017-1/03/2018

- See the honor guard escorting fallen San Bernardino County deputy to coroner's office
- House fire lights up night
- Homeowner arrested at scene of fire
- A year of trouble: From murder and mayhem to a bribery arrest, crime was High Desert's 2017 watchword
- California communities underneath siege from wind-driven fires
- Blaze erupts at Victorville apartment complex
- Woman dies in late-night Hwy 395 crash
- Light plane lands safely in San Bernardino after pilot reports landing gear trouble

See the honor guard escorting fallen San Bernardino County deputy to coroner's office

Brian Rokos, The Press-Enterprise

Posted: January 03, 2018, 2:11 a.m.



The honor guard from the San Bernardino Sheriff's Department, along with officers from other agencies across Southern California, escorts the body of San Bernardino sheriff's Deputy Lawrence "Larry" Falce from the hospital to the coroner's office following his death Tuesday night, Jan. 2. Falce, 70, of San Bernardino, suffered fatal injuries in an assault following a car crash while he was off duty Sunday morning. (Staff photo by Rick Sforza, The Sun/SCNG)

The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department began the solemn process of saying farewell to a fallen colleague Tuesday night, just hours after the death of Deputy Lawrence "Larry" Falce.

Two days earlier, on New Year's Eve morning, Falce was punched by someone he'd been in a car crash with while off-duty. Falce, 70, had been with the Sheriff's Department for 36 years, including 32 on patrol out of the Central Station in his hometown of San Bernardino.

By Tuesday, Falce was in grave condition, and around midday the Sheriff's Department began planning for the worst, Sgt. Marc Bracco said. Falce was pronounced dead just after 8 p.m.

Dozens of law enforcement officers from across Southern California soon arrived at Loma Linda University Medical Center to escort his body to the San Bernardino County Coroner's Office a few miles away.

"One of the most difficult things we must do as law enforcement officers is say goodbye to one of our own," the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department tweeted. "Rest easy brother, we'll take it from here."

Uniformed members of the sheriff's honor guard carried Falce's flag-draped body out of the hospital. Among those saluting as he passed were orange-clad members of the department's search and rescue team, which Falce had worked on into his 60s.

At the other end of the procession, two **San Bernardino County Fire** Department ladder trucks hoisted a giant American flag over the entrance to the Coroner's Office on Lena Road.

Firefighters saluted as the procession passed underneath, and bagpipers played "Amazing Grace" as Falce's body was unloaded from the transport van. The honor guard carried him past another column of crisply saluting police officers inside the building, where an autopsy will be performed.

Two members of the honor guard will remain with Falce's body until funeral services are held, Cpl. Ruben Perez said. No date has been announced.

San Bernardino resident Robyn Downs saw the huge flag after running errands, and when she came to the Coroner's Office, she was told about Falce's death.

She waited with her three granddaughters for the procession.

“It’s important to show our respect for our law enforcement,” Downs said. “They have a tough job and they don’t get enough respect for what they do.”

Also in the crowd there to pay their respects was Deputy William Champin, who worked with Falce for about 14 years at the Central Station.

“Age didn’t define him,” Champin said.

Falce would go on long hikes in the mountains as a member of the search and rescue team. “The younger deputies couldn’t keep up with him,” Champin said.

Champin said he asked Falce every year for the past seven or eight years when he planned to retire. “It was always next year. . . . He loved it. That was his life — this department,” Champin said.

<https://www.pe.com/2018/01/02/honor-guard-escorts-fallen-san-bernardino-county-deputy-to-coroners-office/>

House fire lights up night

Hector Hernandez Jr., Highland News

Posted: January 2, 2018

On Thursday, Dec. 28, the night sky over north Highland was set aglow when a vacant single-story, single-family home in the 2100 block of N. La Verne Avenue caught fire at about 7. A quick and large response from **San Bernardino County fire** crews put out the flames in about 15 minutes, leaving the home's interior burned out.

According to County Fire, when the first crews arrived on scene the home was fully involved and fully engulfed. A total of 21 personnel, all County Fire, from five fire engines, one truck, one squad and a fire chief filled La Verne Avenue closing it to traffic and slowing traffic on Highland Avenue to the north.

There were no reported injuries and the home was boarded up to keep people from entering the damaged structure. The fire's cause is under investigation.

http://www.highlandnews.net/news/public_safety/house-fire-lights-up-night/article_7a6ca10a-f016-11e7-89ce-a3b5d421fb14.html

Homeowner arrested at scene of fire

Stacy Moore, Hi-Desert Star

Posted: January 2, 2018, 5:22 p.m.

YUCCA VALLEY — A woman was arrested on suspicion of arson on the scene of a house fire Tuesday afternoon at 7755 Cherokee Trail.

A sheriff's deputy handcuffed the woman, who was dressed in a bikini and smeared with soot, and led her to his patrol SUV as firefighters tore down smoldering insulation and chased hot spots inside her house. The fire was reported at 1:03 p.m. "The initial report was a residential structure fire, and the structure at the time was occupied and perhaps someone who was inside of it started the fire ... on purpose," Battalion Chief Donny Vilorio said. He identified that person as the woman who was arrested.

Arson investigators from the fire and sheriff's departments were headed to the scene from San Bernardino as fire crews continued their work. Vilorio said only they could confirm whether the suspicions of arson were born out by evidence at the scene.

"It looks as if there are some tell-tale signs that suggest it might be the case," he said. "Until the investigation is complete, we can't be certain."

The downtown Yucca Valley fire station's crew arrived at the house to find heavy smoke and flames at the front door. They started with an attack from the outside as crews from Yucca Mesa and Joshua Tree pulled up to the scene. "Once all these rigs got into place, we were able to coordinate an interior attack and ventilate the roof," Vilorio said.

Flames consumed the front northern corner of the house, just next to a tree that towers above the roof and a few yards away from the house next door. "Adjacent structures were threatened, but we were able to protect those exposures," Vilorio said.

A neighbor who stood watching the flames said the current residents, the woman and her husband, had only been living there for a few months. Tammi Nicholas said the house sold in October and she had helped the original resident move out on Oct. 28. "I'm in disbelief right now," Nicholas said.

Nicholas and another neighbor said before the suspect was arrested, she told them she had an oil lamp burning in the bedroom and knocked it over.

The official cause of the fire has not been released.

http://www.hidesertstar.com/news/article_8f25512e-f024-11e7-a348-47b8a96aef3.html

A year of trouble: From murder and mayhem to a bribery arrest, crime was High Desert's 2017 watchword

Staff Report, VV Daily Press

Posted January 2, 2018 at 11:09 a.m.



A Los Angeles County Fire Department helicopter hoists a horse to Bowen Ranch in Rural Apple Valley on Monday, Nov. 27. **San Bernardino County Fire** firefighters rescued it from Deep Creek. The horse was trapped in a steep ravine overnight. The Atlantic magazine deemed this photograph, by Daily Press chief photographer James Quigg, one of the 25 best in the nation in 2017. [James Quigg, Daily Press]

The year 2017 in the High Desert had it all: Murder, mystery, change and growth.

It was a year of highs and lows, too, and one not without controversy and conflict.

Here's a look at the top 10 news stories of the year, as selected by the Daily Press staff:

1. Jermaine Wright arrested

Adelanto's Mayor Pro Tem had been riding high as the city used the medical marijuana industry to help right its financial ship. Besides being a key member of the council majority, Wright also became a high-profile member of the business community as the owner of Fat Boyz Grill.

But everything changed in November, when the FBI arrested Wright, a pastor, on suspicion of bribery and attempted arson. Court documents provided the shocking details and also provided insight into an ongoing federal corruption probe in the city.

Wright pleaded not guilty to the charges, but some on the council called for him to resign.

2. Sabrina Limon convicted of murder

One of the highest profile murder cases in recent memory came to an end when a Bakersfield jury convicted former Helendale resident Sabrina Limon of murder in the death of her husband at a railroad facility in Tehachapi. Limon plotted the murder with her former lover, Hesperia resident Jonathan Hearn, who accepted a 25-year sentence for killing Robert Limon in exchange for testifying against Sabrina Limon.

The twisted tale featured testimony that focused on the Limon's swinging lifestyle that featured multiple sexual partners, Sabrina Limon's affair with Hearn, and a plot to poison Robert Limon's pudding that was scrapped in favor of Hearn using a makeshift silencer to shoot his rival to death.

3. Murders skyrocket as violent crime spikes

Violent crime was one of the biggest stories of the year, as San Bernardino County Sheriff John McMahon confirmed the violent crime rate in the High Desert had soared 20 percent in the first half of the year.

But that was just part of the story. It turned out the region's homicide rate jumped as well, with 31 murders reported through mid-December, 11 more than in 2016. Victorville saw nearly half the homicides, with 14 reported. That equaled the combined number of homicides reported in the city in 2015 and 2016.

Twelve-year-old Makiya Walls became the face of the alarming trend as her shooting death in Victorville acted as a rallying cry for change. San Bernardino County Supervisor Robert Lovingood later poured an extra million dollars into public safety, allowing McMahon to carry out more gang sweeps in the region.

4. Tapestry lawsuit settled

Following a nearly 18-month court battle, the Terra Verde Group in June reached a settlement with the Center for Biological Diversity, which led the lawsuit along with the San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society and the Sierra Club. The lawsuit claimed Tapestry would destroy more than 5,800 acres of wildlands, endangered species' critical habitat, wetlands and farmland.

The settlement included trimming the massive housing project to 15,633 homes, a concession that added 1,060 additional acres of open space for wildlife and the endangered Arroyo toad. The 30-year construction project in southeast Hesperia will be built in 10 phases and will increase the population of Hesperia by about 48,000.

A settlement also was reached with the Crestline Sanitation District when Terre Verde removed a portion of Phase 10 and offered the district a long-term agreement for water discharge.

5. Voters back Apple Valley in water war

Apple Valley Voters' passage of Measure F in June earned the town a significant victory in its struggle to acquire Liberty Utilities' water system. With 7,200 of 12,438 voters casting "yes" ballots, the town received approval to issue up to \$150 million in revenue-bond debt for a potential purchase of the system.

With a funding mechanism secured, the town has its sights set on a right-to-take trial, which could pick up steam in 2018 following the conclusion of a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) case Liberty filed against the town in 2015. A San Bernardino County Superior Court judge heard closing arguments in the CEQA case earlier this month and a ruling should come in February.

6. Yucca Loma Bridge opens

The long-awaited Yucca Loma Bridge officially became the High Desert's longest when the 1,606-foot span opened to traffic in May. Completion of the Green Tree Boulevard Extension — the third and final phase of the multi-agency Yucca Loma Corridor project — is expected to ease congestion along Highway 18 and Bear Valley Road to Interstate 15 via the Yucca Loma Bridge, which was phase one.

Initially, Victorville struggled to acquire funding but gained it mostly through a \$12.5 million loan from the San Bernardino County Transportation Authority. Construction is anticipated to begin in mid-2019 with completion expected in early 2020. In the interim, the bridge could be an economic driver for Apple Valley, with a shopping center possible at the corner of Apple Valley and Yucca Loma roads.

7. Oak Hills hazing suits settled

The Hesperia Unified School District doled out a half-million dollars to settle two cases brought by former Oak Hills High School freshman football players who claimed they were subjected to sexual hazing on campus.

One case brought national attention on ESPN's "Outside the Lines." It was settled at the beginning of the year for \$375,000. The second case was settled for \$125,000. Both victims alleged they had been touched inappropriately as part of the ritual.

8. Voters reject sales tax hikes in Victorville, Barstow

With Victorville and Barstow facing increasing costs for fire protection, city officials asked voters to approve half-cent sales tax hikes to fund more manpower and equipment (in Victorville) and pensions (in Barstow).

But despite the support of the City Councils and numerous other city and regional leaders, voters in both cities narrowly defeated the ballot measures, which were opposed by the county firefighters union.

Both cities move into 2018 still grappling for ways to maintain local control without having to turn over all fire services to County Fire.

9. 'Biggest' storm in years hammers region

The beginning of the year was marked by a wet, fierce winter season that pummeled the region with powerful storms — including one in mid-February that caused a wave of unprecedented destruction throughout the Victor Valley. That Feb. 17 storm, deemed by experts the "biggest" in years, came after an unusually wet January. Chaos erupted that day as rain flooded roads and winds relentlessly swept the region — with multiple traffic incidents, rescues, and downed power lines and trees keeping public safety personnel busy.

One Victorville man, Michael Williams, 41, lost his life when his silver Mercedes was swept away by rushing waters at Pebble Beach and Arrowhead drives. Williams' car was submerged and despite a swift-water rescue effort, authorities were unable to free Williams in time to save his life.

The storm also managed to collapse a portion of southbound I-15, taking a semi truck and a San Bernardino County Fire Department engine with it. All those on board escaped before the vehicles slid down into the creek bed below. It cost Caltrans officials \$3 million to repair the collapsed portion of the I-15. Repairs were completed by March 29.

10. Cracker Barrel coming

The High Desert still doesn't have a Trader Joe's, but come February it will have the state's first Cracker Barrel restaurant. The national chain decided Victorville's restaurant row was the right place for its initial foray into the Golden State and area residents will be the beneficiaries. Serving comfort food — good, old-fashioned Southern-style cooking — Cracker Barrel will open for business Feb. 5. Expect long lines, but they'll be worth the wait.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20180102/year-of-trouble-from-murder-and-mayhem-to-bribery-arrest-crime-was-high-deserts-2017-watchword>

California communities underneath siege from wind-driven fires

Kaplan Contributor, Kaplan Herald

Posted: January 1, 2018

VENTURA, Calif. — Wind-driven fires tore through California communities Tuesday for the second time in two months, leaving hundreds of homes feared lost and uprooting tens of thousands of people.

The most damaging fire was in Ventura County northwest of Los Angeles, where 150 structures were confirmed destroyed. But a fire official said he suspected “hundreds more” would be lost when flames died down enough to make a thorough assessment.

In the San Gabriel Mountains foothills of Los Angeles about 45 miles (72 kilometers) away from the city, 30 structures burned. Mayor Eric Garcetti said the gusty winds expected to last most of the week had created a dangerous situation and he urged 150,000 people under mandatory evacuation orders to leave their homes before it’s too late.

“We have lost structures, we have not lost lives,” he said. “Do not wait. Leave your homes.” The fires in Ventura County lit up hillsides and spread rapidly Monday evening from rural rolling hills to dense subdivisions. Residents, already warned of extreme fire danger, were sent automated phone alerts and evacuations appeared to proceed smoothly.

As the sun rose Tuesday, the first of at least three additional Southern California fires broke out, fueled by stiff winds that prevented firefighting aircraft most of the day from dumping water to protect homes or attack the march of flames.

In addition to prompting hasty evacuations, the fires shut down two freeways for hours and sent heavy, acrid smoke billowing over the Los Angeles area, creating a health hazard for millions.

There were no immediate reports of any deaths. Two people were critically injured in a small **San Bernardino County fire**, but no other serious injuries were reported. The fires were under investigation and no causes had been found.

The Ventura wildfire exploded to nearly 80 square miles (207 square kilometers) in a matter of hours. It was fanned by dry Santa Ana winds clocked at well over 60 mph (96 kph) and spit embers up to a half-mile (0.8 kilometers) ahead of fire lines.

Lisa Kermode ignored the first evacuation alert that buzzed on her phone when it said the fire was 15 miles (24 kilometers) away from her home. But the flames were nearly on top of her an hour later when she rounded up her three children, still in their pajamas, and told them to grab some jeans so they could leave.

They returned home Tuesday to find their home and world in ashes, including a Christmas tree and the presents they had just bought.

“We got knots in our stomach coming back up here,” Kermode said. “We lost everything, everything, all our clothes, anything that was important to us. All our family heirlooms — it’s not sort of gone, it’s completely gone.”

The fires came just eight weeks after the deadliest and most destructive series of wildfires in state history burned through Northern California and its fabled wine country and killed 44 people dead and destroyed 8,900 homes and other buildings.

Fires are not typical in Southern California this time of year but can break out when dry vegetation and too little rain combine with the Santa Ana winds. Hardly any measurable rain has fallen in the region over the past six months.

Like the deadly October fires in Napa and Sonoma counties, the new blazes were in areas more suburban than rural.

Fires in those settings are likely to become more frequent as climate change makes fire season a year-round threat and will put greater pressure on local budgets, said Char Miller, a professor of environmental analysis at Pomona College who has written extensively about wildfires.

<https://kaplanherald.com/2018/01/01/california-communities-underneath-siege-from-wind-driven-fires/>

Blaze erupts at Victorville apartment complex

Staff Reports, VV Daily Press

Posted: December 29, 2017, 10:47 a.m.

VICTORVILLE — Firefighters battled a blaze that erupted at an apartment complex here Friday morning. **San Bernardino County Fire** Department personnel rushed to the scene shortly after 9 a.m. after receiving multiple reports of a fire at the Colony Apartments in the 14400 block of Begonia Road.

Units arriving at the two-story complex found “heavy fire” coming from several windows and the front door of a first-story apartment, fire officials said.

A search of the apartment, which was found to be clear, was conducted as firefighters attacked the blaze. They were able to confine the flames before they spread to other units. The fire was under control in less than 40 minutes, officials said.

Six engines, two truck companies, a medic squad, two chief officers, and a fire investigator responded. Officials said damage estimates weren’t immediately available.

No injuries were reported from the fire, which remains under investigation.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20171229/blaze-erupts-at-victorville-apartment-complex>

Woman dies in late-night Hwy 395 crash

Staff Reports, VV Daily Press

Posted: December 29, 2017, 1:40 p.m.

KRAMER JUNCTION — A woman was killed in a head-on crash that left several others injured on Highway 395 late Thursday night.

Reported at 11:23 p.m., the crash involved three vehicles and occurred on Highway 395 near mile post marker 37.00, about ten miles south of Kramer Junction, California Highway Patrol officials said.

The crash occurred as a 21-year-old La Mesa woman was headed south on Highway 395 in a 2005 Toyota Corolla, while a 28-year-old man from Chino was headed the opposite direction in a 2017 Toyota Sienna. The woman allowed the Corolla to drift across the solid yellow line and into the opposite traffic lane, directly into the path of the Sienna, officials said.

As the vehicles collided head on, a 31-year-old Inyokern woman in a 2013 Toyota Prius headed north on Highway 395 collided with the left side of the Corolla.

“As a result of this collision, the driver of the Toyota Corolla received fatal injuries and was pronounced deceased at the scene by **San Bernardino County Fire** Department personnel,” CHP officials said.

The name of the woman is being withheld pending positive identification and notification of next of kin.

CHP officials said the remaining occupants in the other vehicles sustained “major to minor injuries” and were transported to local hospitals for treatment. Further updates on their condition weren’t available Friday.

Officials said alcohol and drugs do not appear to be a factor in this crash, which remains under investigation.

Anyone with information or who may have witnessed the crash is urged to contact CHP’s Victorville office at 760-241-1186.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20171229/woman-dies-in-late-night-hwy-395-crash>

Light plane lands safely in San Bernardino after pilot reports landing gear trouble

Jim Steinberg, San Bernardino Sun

Posted: December 29, 2017, 8:38 p.m.



A plane made an emergency landing Friday night at San Bernardino International Airport. The pilot was not hurt. Photo courtesy San Bernardino County Fire Department.

SAN BERNARDINO –There was drama in the skies above San Bernardino International Airport on Friday night when a single-engine plane circled the airport with what the pilot reported as a possible landing gear problem.

EMS and **San Bernardino County Fire** Department crews mobilized in preparation for a worst-case landing, but in the end the pilot of the Cessna 210J landed the plane safely.

The pilot had circled the airport for just over an hour to burn fuel prior to landing, fire officials said.

The pilot was the only person in the plane, said officials from the fire agency, which had staged an aircraft crash rig and other fire apparatus in preparation for the landing.

A San Bernardino County Fire District photo shows one of the rigs positioned at San Bernardino International Airport on Friday night after the pilot of a small plane reported landing gear trouble and prepared to land. Upon landing, the gear did not support the plane’s weight.

“The pilot walked away,” said Mark Gibbs, airport director of aviation.

The gear was not locked in place during the landing, Gibbs said.

The plane did not catch fire.

The incident will be investigated by the FAA, Gibbs said.

<https://www.pe.com/2017/12/29/light-plane-lands-safely-in-san-bernardino-after-reporting-landing-gear-trouble/>