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The things she carried

Matthew Cabe, Daily Press

Posted: August 12, 2017, 12:57 PM



A year after the Pilot Fire, Jeanne Helsley looks over her Hesperia property. Helsley had to evacuate, and did so for the first time without the help of her husband, who died in 2012. [James Quigg, Daily Press]

HESPERIA — There wasn't much time.

Evacuations had been ordered. Jeanne Helsley could see the Pilot Fire as it torched the Pinnacles — a popular hiking destination — from her home just north of the Joshua Inn, a dive bar that she said has produced “good neighbors.”

“I was out in a half-hour,” Helsley recalled.

She'd been through this before. After moving to Hesperia in 1979, Helsley and her husband, Eugene, were thrice evacuated during large fires. But this time was different.

“Previously I had a husband. He passed away five years ago,” Helsley said. “As an individual, there were a lot of painful last-minute decisions of things I couldn't put in the car to take with me. Things I couldn't carry.”

Eugene Helsley — an 86-year-old Army veteran who guarded German prisoners during World War II — died on the Fourth of July in 2012. He bequeathed to his wife six decades of a life together, as well as the accomplishments of a more than 30-year career in the private sector and municipal government.

Jeanne Helsley left behind more than she took, including her favorite of Eugene's multiple awards.

“Something I love dearly. This is a bond to build roads on the moon. It's not real,” she said, smiling. “That's the hard part of leaving. You see on the walls all the awards he got. I have two boxes full in the garage.”

What about the framed collection of ribbons from her years spent showing champion dogs? An elegant grandfather clock in the entryway? A horde of novels by Clive Cussler and James Patterson (Helsley is a book-a-week reader)? There was “no question.” It all stayed.

Helsley walked into a sitting room near her home's front door where a handful of art pieces hung.

“Every picture in this room was painted by someone I know, and I had to leave them all,” she said before pointing to a wood carving. “It’s the town square in Mannheim, Germany. One of my husband’s prisoners liked him so well, he made this wood carving for him.”

In a room near the stairs, two tall hutches sat on opposite ends of the room. One was filled with glassware, the other with beer steins.

“I don’t climb ladders anymore, and I couldn’t get to the beer steins up there,” Helsley said. “I just said, ‘Goodbye. I hope you’re here when I get back.’”

Before she left, though, Helsley prioritized the things she eventually carried. She started atop the staircase where she pulled family photos of the wall, slipping them into a pillowcase as she descended.

“When there was two of us I got a pillowcase full, and he could walk it to the car,” she said.

In her husband’s absence, a grandson, Sean, helped her with two items about which Helsley was adamant — a century-old schoolhouse clock her son acquired while stationed in Germany in the 1970s and a 10-song music box she inherited from her grandmother.

She twisted a dial inside the music box that started “Aus dem Norden,” a 19th-century waltz composed by Alphonse Czibulka. The title translates to “From the North.”

“It belonged to (my grandmother’s) brother,” Helsley said. “He was the governor of North Dakota. It sat in his office, and you put your coin in here to play music while you were waiting to see him.”

A gold pocket watch rested next to the music box. It formerly belonged to her husband’s great uncle. Helsley said it was a railroad watch from when he worked in Albuquerque, New Mexico. That went “because that’s little.”

She made sure to take the elephant figurines procured in far-off countries.

“I probably have close to three dozen,” Helsley said. “I have a family of China elephants. I took them. I took all my Bibles ... and family albums.”

Then there was the business of Sophie, a rescue dog wary of strangers, but Helsley’s companion the last four years.

“The thought of leaving her to be burned up by the fire was something I couldn’t do,” she said. “We were able to get her into the crate.”

After Helsley departed, all was silent save the recurring chimes emanating from that too-large grandfather clock. Her home, along with the memories it contains, waited.

“For four days I was out of the home,” Helsley said. “I stayed with friends. As soon as the evacuated area was posted, they called me and invited me to come stay with them.”

Helsley said she suspected her home would be spared, but the emotional experience of picking and choosing what might have been destroyed remained palpable.

“It’s a whole different perspective when you’re used to having someone help you and, all the sudden, you have to do this by yourself,” she said.

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20170812/things-she-carried>

High Desert residents recall past wildfires

Rene Ray De La Cruz, Hesperia Star

Posted: August 12, 2017, 2:02 PM

VICTORVILLE — San Bernardino County has seen its fair share of fires over the years and High Desert residents have felt the impact of several of those blazes.

On the one-year anniversary of the Bluecut and Pilot fires, several residents and community leaders recalled some of the largest blazes that have led to evacuations, closed traffic routes, destroyed homes and claimed lives over the last 40 years.

The Old Fire

Apple Valley Mayor Pro Tem Art Bishop, who served as the deputy chief of the Apple Valley Fire Protection District during the Old Fire, said he thought the “monstrous” blaze would never end.

Known as the most devastating blaze to ever strike the area, the arson-ignited Old Fire started on Oct. 25, 2003 in Waterman Canyon near Highway 18 in the San Bernardino Mountains.

The Old Fire claimed the lives of six residents and destroyed 940 homes, along with 30 commercial buildings and 300 outbuildings.

During the fire, billowing smoke poured over the mountains and into the High Desert as more than 4,000 firefighters battled the blaze that spread to 91,281 acres and led to the evacuation of over 70,000 residents near the areas of Crestline, Running Springs and Lake Arrowhead.

“The fire moved into Apple Valley and we ended up evacuating the Marianas toward the south — we even lost homes in that area,” Bishop said. “The fire was erratic — it started near Lake Arrowhead, came down into Apple Valley, backed up toward Lucerne Valley, into Green Valley and into Fawnskin.”

Bishop said strike teams from across the state, including the city of Los Angeles, helped the AVFPD battle the fire. District Chief Doug Qualls was part of the incident management team in Lake Arrowhead.

Red Cross officials and an army of volunteers kept busy as mountain residents sought refuge at Hesperia Lake, the San Bernardino County Fairgrounds in Victorville and several churches in the Victor Valley that set up cots, handed out supplies and served meals, the Daily Press reported.

Bishop said the mass number of evacuated animals — such as dogs, cats, donkeys, horses, goats and cattle from the mountain and Marianna communities — was “mind boggling.”

“Just like the Old Fire, the Willow Fire in 1999 moved into Apple Valley and destroyed many homes and property,” Bishop said. “These fires that start miles away in the forest can move rapidly and right into our own backyards.”

The Old Fire also traveled west and crossed over Interstate 15, where it merged with the Grand Prix Fire, which began two days earlier in the San Gabriel Mountains above Fontana.

The drought, coupled with Santa Ana winds and a bark beetle infestation that killed many trees, fueled the Old Fire that finally relented in November, Bishop said.

“We’ve all battled a lot of fires, but that Old Fire was probably one of the worse that I’ve ever seen personally,” Bishop said. “It was also the worse fire month that California had ever experienced.”

October was dubbed the “2003 Firestorm” and “The California Fire Siege of 2003” by many fire officials. The fires burned 750,043 acres, destroyed 3,710 homes, killed 24 people and took the life of one firefighter.

The month also included the Cedar Fire in San Diego County, which killed 15, burned 2,232 homes and devoured 273,246 acres. It was the largest fire recorded in California history.

Notable fires

Grand Prix Fire

Where: Near Fontana

When: Oct. 21, 2003

Acres burned: 69,894

Buildings destroyed: 196

Deaths: 0

Cause: Accidental

Willow Fire

Where: Near Lake Arrowhead

When: Aug. 28 to Sept. 6, 1999

Acres burned: 64,000

Buildings destroyed: 60

Deaths: 0

Cause: Unknown

Note: The fire spread into Apple Valley, destroying 19 structures, 72 vehicles, 52 outbuildings and burned more than 9,000 acres.

“I remember watching the local mountains glowing with fire one night, then watering our roof and property the next,” said Ernie Pineda, 63, who lived on Poppy Road in Apple Valley during that time. “The fire came down the mountain pretty fast and the wind starting blowing burning debris into the air.”

Pineda said most of the homes in his neighborhood escaped the fire, adding that he felt a rush of “fear” and “sadness” when he saw other structures go up in flames.

Bluecut Fire

Where: Interstate 15 and Highway 138 in the Cajon Pass

When: Aug. 16-24, 2016
Mandatory evacuation orders: 82,000 residents
Acres burned: 36,274 acres
Buildings destroyed: 318
Deaths: 0
Cause: Undetermined

Lake Fire

Where: Near Big Bear
When: June 2015
Acres burned: 31,359 acres
Buildings destroyed: 4
Deaths: 0
Cause: Human activity

Panorama Fire

Where: Waterman Canyon
When: November 1980
Acres burned: 28,800
Buildings destroyed: 423
Deaths: 4
Cause: Arson

Pilot Fire

Where: Near Highway 138, south of Hesperia
When: Aug. 7-16, 2016
Mandatory evacuation orders: 5,300
Acres burned: 8,110
Buildings destroyed: 0
Deaths: 0
Cause: Unknown

North Fire

Where: Cajon Pass
When: July 2015
Acres burned: 4,250 acres
Buildings destroyed: 23
Vehicles destroyed: 74
Injuries: 3
Deaths: 0
Cause: Undetermined

Note: Evacuations were ordered for the Phelan and the Baldy Mesa areas.

Phelan resident Judith Claremont told the Daily Press the North Fire may have been “smaller in scale” than others fires, but the blaze caught many residents “off guard.”

“What started as small fire by the freeway turned into a firestorm that destroyed cars on I-15. We saw people on TV getting out of their cars and running to safety,” Claremont, 47, said. “Then, the fire started moving up the hill toward Phelan and we got real scared.”

Claremont said she’s praying this year’s fire season will not be a “repeat performance” of last year.

<http://www.hesperia.com/news/20170812/high-desert-residents-recall-past-wildfires>

Trial by fire

Paola Baker, Hesperia Star

Posted: August 12, 2017, 2:15 PM



Captain Jay Hausman of the San Bernardino County Fire Department visits the Cajon Pass near where the Bluecut Fire began a year ago. Hausman and his crew were in the thick of the fight in both the Pilot and Bluecut fires. [James Quigg, Daily Press]

WEST CAJON VALLEY — San Bernardino County Fire Department Capt. Jay Hausman gazed at the fire-scarred hills in Swarthout Canyon, a thoughtful look on his face as he relived the days he spent on the massive Bluecut Fire a year ago.

Hausman, a captain at Station 232 in San Bernardino, said he and his three-man crew spent six days working on the large wildfire, which ultimately burned over 36,000 acres and destroyed 105 homes before fire crews were able to rein it in.

“We were on the initial attack for Bluecut, so we were one of the very first County Fire engines there,” Hausman said as he studied blackened trees and scorched rocks juxtaposed against new brush from a wet winter. “For large fires, it’s one of the largest I’ve been on.”

This was Hausman’s second big fire in as many weeks. He and the crew spent nearly the same amount of time working on the Pilot Fire, which burned over 8,000 acres in the San Bernardino mountains and Summit Valley area. Tasked to protect the homes along Highway 173, Hausman said the crew worked about 36 hours straight after receiving their assignment on the second day of the blaze, before moving into 12-hour shifts.

“I was on the Pilot Fire for four days, got a day off, then the next day, Bluecut happens,” Hausman said.

As the Pilot Fire began to wind down, the first reports of another blaze along Old Cajon Boulevard began to emerge. The massive Bluecut Fire had begun.

Observing the damage the blaze left behind, Hausman recalled, somewhat ironically, that the day began as a fairly regular day for the crew. As they headed up to Swarthout Canyon, smoke from the fire was already visible from the Cajon Pass — but at the time, as Hausman recalled, the fire “wasn’t doing much,” and crews were confident it would soon be quelled.

“We got on scene and got our assignment, which was laying hose lines on the mountain, so we geared up and did our thing,” Hausman said. “Then, the fire jumped.”

All of a sudden, things changed rapidly, Hausman said, from what was supposed to be a “simple hose lay, putting out the fire,” to an increasingly dangerous situation.

“The anticipation was the fire was going to burn into Swarthout Canyon, so now we had to do everything we could to protect homes and structures there,” Hausman said. The crew immediately got to work doing just that, as the flames continued to rage and grow all around them.

Hausman remembered arriving at a ranch at dire risk from the approaching flames. Expecting the area to be evacuated, the crew was surprised to arrive and see a woman, the homeowner, on a tractor, attempting to protect her property.

“We told her, you need to leave. She said, very rudely, I’m not leaving,” Hausman said. “At that point, I had to make a decision: Do I leave them? Or do I stay and protect them?”

Choosing the latter option, Hausman and the crew stayed put, working the flames with the help of another engine and crew. But the blaze kept growing.

“As the fire was approaching I saw the woman jump off the tractor and go into her house,” Hausman said. “The last thing I remember was seeing her feet going up the hill into her house. Then the fire hit us.”

The flames drew nearer and nearer, eventually melting and damaging parts of the crew’s engine, as well as burning the home and several buildings on the ranch. This, together with heat and smoke injuries from the growing inferno, forced the crew to temporarily retreat.

“My fireman said, ‘my face is melting’ — that’s how close we were,” Hausman said.

The crew was taken to Arrowhead Regional Medical Center, where Hausman said the nurses “took great care of us, so we were back to 100 percent,” as a fire mechanic took care of the damaged engine. Their injuries were minor, Hausman said, and within a few hours, the crew was itching to get back to work.

Hausman chuckled as he recalled the shocked look on his nurse’s face when he asked her if he could return to full duty.

“Her jaw dropped and she said, ‘you want to go back?’ I said, ‘Yes, this is what I do. You fixed me and I’m ready to go back,’” Hausman said. “So we got back in the engine and went into Summit Valley, and once we get there we were right back to fighting fire again.”

As with the Pilot Fire, the crew remained working the fire lines for another 36 hours before moving into 12-hour shifts, day and night, until the fire was fully contained. The fire, fortunately, didn't result in a loss of life, and the women in the property Hausman originally protected were able to escape the flames.

Hausman showed the Daily Press a photo ABC-7 snapped after he and the crew were taken to the hospital that first day. Apart from most of his forehead, covered by his helmet, his face was completely black from the soot and smoke of the blaze.

But despite the danger and his injuries, Hausman said he would do it all over again. As he told the nurse at Arrowhead, this is what he does.

“My job is to protect life. Life, property, and the environment,” Hausman said. “But do you give up your life to save another? That's what I did, I put my life on the line to save these people. It's hard to put it that way. But that's what happened.”

<http://www.hesperiastar.com/news/20170812/trial-by-fire>

Brought together by Bluecut: Volunteers reflect a year later

Charity Lindsey, Daily Press

Posted: August 12, 2017, 5:08 PM



Volunteers at the San Bernardino County fairgrounds in Victorville assist with horses brought in from Bluecut fire evacuees in 2016. [Photo courtesy of Dave Gross]

Illuminated by twinkle lights, with the texture of crumpled foil and the shape of a mangled tree branch, the wall art in an Adelanto woman's bedroom reminds her what it means to make a difference.

"To anyone else, it's just a bunch of melted metal," Heather Gaines said. But when the woman whose home was lost to the Bluecut Fire gave it as a gift, it was all she could afford to show her thanks for the hours Gaines spent searching for her pets.

It's a melted car rim — "melted, but weren't destroyed," the woman told her.

"They survived the fire, but they will never be the same," she told Gaines when they met on her charred property five days after the Bluecut Fire burned 36,274 acres and more than 100 homes.

"I want you to take this one. To remember that no matter what hits, you're not destroyed ... Also to remember the sacrifices you made and the happiness you brought to me and my kids when you found our cat and dog. Put this on your wall and always remember, you made a difference in someone's life."

Gaines was just one soldier in the many armies of volunteers who united during the Pilot and Bluecut fires last year, from business owners who donated food and supplies to fire evacuees, to those who went without sleep as they tirelessly searched for lost pets and livestock.

She described coming across dozens of people who helped while more than 34,000 homes were evacuated and "asked for nothing in return," a number of whom she has developed lasting friendships with — including "a new best friend," a dog who ran from the fire who Gaines rescued and named Buddy.

At the San Bernardino County fairgrounds, more than 400 animals were handled, fed by community donations, calmed by loving volunteers and, eventually, safely returned to their owners.

The volunteer coordinator at the fairgrounds, Dave Gross, reflected on the fire last week, noting that with the amount of surplus donations that were received and “the knowledge we have now,” “we are now equipped to take care of as many animals that could come to the fairgrounds.”

“I’ve learned that our community comes together at the drop of a hat. They supported everything wholeheartedly,” Gross said. “Would I do it again? Absolutely. The animals can’t take care of themselves; they need someone to take care of them. And it wasn’t just me. It was a team effort.”

Gross noted that “just about every feed store in the High Desert” donated animal supplies, while dozens of local restaurants provided food for the volunteers working day and night.

Those volunteers not at the fairgrounds might have been at Mea Ola’s Place, a horse rescue in Phelan that transformed into an evacuation and relief center during the fire. Or at the Sultana High School gym, which started as a care center and became a full-fledged shelter, hosting displaced residents when evacuations orders were extended.

Others were at the Apple Valley Animal Shelter, taking care of as many small animals — mostly dogs and cats — as they could take in, or transporting animals to the Devore Animal Shelter.

Still more were in the parking lot of the vacant Walmart lot off Balsam Avenue and Bear Valley Road in Victorville, which hosted emergency personnel to assist evacuees, or operating out of community churches that collected thousands of pounds of food and clothes to donate to people who’d lost everything to the fires.

Gaines, who has lived in Adelanto off and on for about 10 years, said that volunteering during the fires “was the first time up here I felt like a part of the community.”

“Now I know there are people out there that have a great heart and will pull together when we need it,” she said. “The Bluecut Fire changed a lot of lives. (It) destroyed lives and homes, and made the High Desert chaotic. But it also brought our community together.”

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20170812/brought-together-by-bluecut-volunteers-reflect-year-later>

Rebuilding a rarity after Bluecut Fire

Matthew Cabe, Daily Press

Posted: August 12, 2017, 6:19 PM



Linda Patterson standing on the foundation that will become her new home. Her home was destroyed in the Bluecut fire last year. She is one of the few who pulled permits to rebuild after the fire. [James Quigg, Daily Press]

WEST CAJON VALLEY — Of course there were problems, the first being that her house was gone.

Linda Patterson wasn't home when the Bluecut Fire ripped through her property, destroying the home she shared with her 91-year-old mother and granddaughter, Claire.

Like many in the West Cajon Valley whose properties were affected by the fire, the second problem she had was restoring power, an ordeal she said came with a list of tasks from San Bernardino County and, as previously reported, Southern California Edison.

"It was a horrible ordeal," Patterson said. "They gave me a bunch of static ... That (electric) pole was up two weeks after the fire, and that took me two months to get fired up."

Patterson called the county and threatened to take her complaints to the press, explaining that she just wanted her power restored.

"I said, 'The list you have here. You gave me a 30-lined item list of things to do that don't even pertain to electric,'" Patterson said. "'I have horses I need to get back on the property. I have to have water so I can start watering my trees before I lose everything.'"

The phone call worked. First District Supervisor Robert Lovingood cut "through the red tape" and got the Land Use Services Department involved.

"I'm his success story, he says," Patterson said. "He went to his board with my story because nobody else (at the time) had pulled permits."

Much of the direct help came from Jim Sowers with county Building and Safety, according to Patterson.

“He walked me through it and took me under his wing, and they’ve taken care of me since,” she said. “I have their cellphone numbers ... Most of these people (who lost power), they don’t have permits. Mr. Sowers got right on the permits so they could get their gardens up and running because that’s their livelihood. Once he understood, he was, like, on it.”

Patterson said Sowers “felt devastated” after putting himself in victims’ shoes and “knew he had to take care of these people in West Cajon Valley,” many of whom emigrated from South Korea.

“I think it’s a language barrier. They don’t understand what it is,” Patterson said of the permitting process. “And I think most of them didn’t have insurance.”

Patterson’s story is unique in that she did have fire insurance. As a result, she said she always intended to rebuild.

More than 100 homes and more than 200 non-residential buildings were lost to the Bluecut, which burned 36,274 acres prior to containment. Statistics provided by the county show that 60 property owners lost structures.

“Since last fall, the county has sent out three letters to each of these property owners encouraging them to take advantage of financial resources available to assist with fire cleanup,” county spokesperson David Wert told the Daily Press. “So far, 20 of the 60 have expressed interest in these resources.”

Just five permit applications were received for rebuilds, according to Wert. Four of the five are under construction, including Patterson’s new home, which will replace the one built in 1945.

Patterson stayed with her sister in Phelan after the fire. Her mother is still there while Patterson makes due with a trailer adjacent to the new home that she said will be two-stories and include a wraparound porch.

In the interim, a new wood fence has been erected around the property. Patterson also rebuilt a shed in a garden area that was destroyed. She added a playhouse for Claire.

“This was all here, but it’s all new, the buildings in the garden,” she said. “That was just a reconstruction of what was there before, except the playhouse wasn’t there before.”

One section of the garden, however, was spared.

“The only thing that didn’t burn, which was strange, was this little corner here where you can see the crosses for my son (Tommy Patterson) and my brother (Bobby Jones), who both died in the last three years,” Patterson said. “This is the only thing. You can see the backs of the crosses are burned. I still need to replace those.”

Still, countless other items — Patterson describes herself as a hoarder — such as antiques, family photos and her grandmother’s Bible were lost. Patterson said had she been home when the fire started, she would’ve known what to save.

The bright side, she said, was that she “had a lot of money in possessions.”

“All my mom’s things were up here,” Patterson said. “The (burned) garage was full of my mom’s house from down below ... Actually, the antiques and all our collectibles — all that hoarding we did — is helping to pay for this house ... The collectibles are what saved us because (insurance companies) can’t degrade that stuff. The older they are the more valuable they are.”

As for the new home, a foundation has been laid and Patterson expects plumbing to be installed soon.

“I’m hoping to be in by Christmas,” Patterson said. “I moved back here (last) December. I got the permits probably about six weeks ago ... I don’t want anything to happen to my mom before I get my mom to this house. I’m giving her the master bedroom downstairs.”

<http://www.vvdailypress.com/news/20170812/rebuilding-rarity-after-bluecut-fire>

A year after Bluecut Fire, hotel price gouging claims still under probe

Shea Johnson, Daily Press

Posted: August 13, 2017, 4:58 PM

Following the devastating Bluecut Fire last August, District Attorney investigators received complaints that more than a dozen regional hotels or motels were illegally raising the prices of rooms to capitalize on tens of thousands stranded motorists and evacuees.

A year later, San Bernardino County Deputy District Attorney Douglas Poston says the formal probe is ongoing.

“We have had, I would say, a number of hotels/motels that we have looked at their records and made the determination we would not pursue any case against them,” Poston told the Daily Press. “I believe at some point a decision will be made whether to proceed against any particular hotel or national chain, but we are not there yet.

“Unfortunately, it’s been a bit slower going than we had hoped.”

Investigators with DA’s Consumer Protection Unit, in the time since the probe was opened, have collected rate advertising and room billing records from the businesses subjected to complaints by guests.

In the early stages, investigators were tasked with contacting hotels and motels in the High Desert and San Bernardino valley area and asking for their cooperation, which Poston said a number have given. But not all were locally operated, meaning prosecutors were forced on occasion to reach out to distant corporate offices, which typically dictate the price.

In order to prove price gouging, they have to establish that room prices jumped more than 10 percent over the standard rate at the point when the county declared a state of emergency — an illegal business practice that applies for 180 days and to more than just hotels/motels.

As a misdemeanor, price gouging penalties include up to a year in jail, a \$10,000 fine or both. The DA’s office would also likely seek civil penalties in the form of \$2,500 per violation (victim).

The efforts have been “voluminous,” Poston said, as investigators have spent hours conducting interviews and poring over advertising and billing records reflecting rates before and after the declaration of emergency.

There has been one investigator assigned to the bulk of the work, as is typical, but that individual regularly receives additional help and Poston said the DA’s office possessed the adequate resources to handle the task.

“We are much closer to decisions than we were when we began this several months ago,” he added.

When the fast-burning blaze effectively shut down southbound Interstate 15, the main corridor out of the Victor Valley, several online reports surfaced that local hotels and motels were significantly bumping up room rates.

Those reports prompted District Attorney Mike Ramos to take to social media to urge believed victims to contact the office’s Consumer Protection Unit.

The Daily Press heard from frustrated fire victims who claimed hotels were charging \$300 or more for a room. Spurred by those complaints, this newspaper reviewed online listings and found, for instance, a two-star motel off Stoddard Wells Road in Victorville advertising \$299 per night, or \$240 more than the price advertised the next day.

Poston said the formal probe, while fully addressing the concerns of those who have raised complaints, is also “every bit as important” to exonerate businesses if it’s determined price gouging did not occur.

He also said complaints, although significantly less than in the immediate aftermath of the fire, were still coming in.

Anyone who believes they were a victim of price gouging should contact the DA’s Consumer Protection Unit at 909-382-7748.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20170813/year-after-bluecut-fire-hotel-price-gouging-claims-still-under-probe>

Two elderly hikers found dead at Amboy Crater

Charity Lindsey, Daily Press

Posted: August 12, 2017, 7:23 PM

AMBOY — Two elderly hikers were found dead Saturday afternoon at the Amboy Crater National Natural Landmark, according to **San Bernardino County Fire Department** officials.

The fire department received a call just before 4 p.m. to assist the San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department in responding to a report of two lost hikers.

Sheriff’s deputies were able to locate the hikers through the 911 call that was received, but county fire officials said they weren’t aware if the caller was one of the victims.

Through further investigation, sheriff’s officials determined both victims were deceased.

A county fire medic accompanied sheriff's officials via helicopter to confirm their deaths. Their location at Amboy Crater, part of the Mojave Trails National Monument, was inaccessible by fire department vehicles, officials said.

The victims were both elderly, one man and one woman, county fire officials said. They were found approximately 100 yards apart from one another.

The cause of death is currently under investigation by the San Bernardino County Sheriff-Coroner division and their identities are being withheld pending positive identification and notification of next of kin.

<http://www.vvdailynews.com/news/20170812/two-elderly-hikers-found-dead-at-amboy-crater>

Yorba Linda couple identified as hikers found dead near Amboy Crater

Ali Tadayon, The Press-Enterprise

Posted: August 12, 2017, 10:29 PM



San Bernardino County sheriff's deputies and fire officials – as well as a sheriff's chopper found two missing hikers dead near the Amboy Crater on Saturday afternoon, Aug. 12, 2017. Courtesy of Manny Lopez

A Yorba Linda couple hiking in the Mojave Desert were found dead Saturday near the Amboy Crater — where authorities believe the air temperature was 113 degrees.

Gen Miake, 60, and Kathie Barber, 58, were found by a San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department helicopter crew 1 to 2 miles east of the trailhead to the crater, "approximately 100 yards from one another in the open desert with no shade," according to a Sheriff's Department news release.

The Amboy Crater is an extinct cinder cone volcano off Route 66 about halfway between Barstow and Needles. The crater is south of the trailhead, while the town of Amboy including the landmark Roy's Motel, Cafe and Gas Station are to the east.

Barber called 911 at 1:36 p.m. Saturday to report that she had been hiking with Miake since 11 a.m. and they had become separated, the news release said.

She was unable to find Miake, who she said had a heart condition. She also told dispatchers that she was out of water.

A deputy from the sheriff's Morongo station and a patrol helicopter based in San Bernardino were both sent to the scene. The deputy found the couple's car at the trailhead but couldn't tell which direction they had gone.

When the helicopter arrived, it began an aerial search and located Barber and Miake, who were both unresponsive. A Fire Department member confirmed they were deceased.

The Amboy Crater is a barren, almost black geological structure that fascinates tourists – particularly those from Europe, said Manny Lopez, the manager of Roy's, on Saturday afternoon. Often, he said, hikers are unprepared for the heat, which can be even hotter on the lava field than in the surrounding desert.

Miake and Barber lived in Yorba Linda for at least 17 years, according to their neighbors.

The neighbors said the couple could be seen holding hands in the mornings, around 5 a.m. as they took walks together before leaving early for work.

“They always seemed so happy together,” said Janay Maisano, 18.

The neighbors said the pair mostly kept to themselves.

<http://www.pe.com/2017/08/12/2-hikers-found-dead-near-amboy-crater-in-the-remote-san-bernardino-county-desert/>

Two hikers found dead near Amboy Crater

Hi Desert Star

Posted: August 13, 2017, 11:03 AM



Bureau of Land Management photo

Amboy Crater, formed of ash and cinders, rises from a volcanic field on the desert floor. The crater and the surrounding land are on federal land, part of the new Mojave Trails National Monument.

AMBOY — A married couple from Yorba Linda died Saturday, Aug. 12, while trying to hike near the Amboy Crater, where temperatures reached 113 degrees.

Kathie Barber, 58, called for help at 1:36 p.m. Saturday and told the San Bernardino County sheriff's dispatch office that she had been hiking with her husband since 11 a.m., and the two had gotten separated.

Barber said her husband, 60-year-old Gen Miake, had a heart condition and she could not find him, the Sheriff's Department reports. She also said she was out of water.

Deputy Nathan Campos from the Morongo Basin sheriff's station was the first to respond; he found the hikers' car parked in the trailhead parking lot, but could not tell in what direction Barber and Miake had gone, according to a news release.

Campos started a search and called for assistance. The Sheriff's Department dispatched its patrol helicopter, call name 40 King 1, and the crew met with Campos in a parking lot at the Amboy trailhead.

The pilot, Deputy K. Henry, and the flight officer, Deputy B. Heard, started an aerial search and found two people matching the description Barber had provided when she called dispatch. They were lying still about 100 yards apart from each other, one to two miles east of the Amboy trailhead.

The two were in the open desert with no shade.

An helicopter landed nearby and Heard hiked over to the two hikers, who appeared to be non-responsive. The Sheriff's Department estimates the temperature was 113 degrees at that time.

The crew flew back to the trailhead to pick up a member of the **San Bernardino County Fire Department** for a second assessment of the hikers. The crew flew back to the hikers and the Fire Department confirmed both Barber and Miake were dead.

A second helicopter, Sheriff's Air Rescue 307, was called in to recover the bodies. The coroner's division also assisted and confirmed the victims' identity.

According to their Facebook pages, Miake and Barber were nearing their 34th wedding anniversary; they were married Aug. 21, 1983. Both were graduates of the University of California, Irvine, and while Miake came from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Barber had attended La Quinta High School.

http://www.hidesertstar.com/the_desert_trail/article_bb8b45e0-8051-11e7-91f1-3377676be238.html

Couple who went hiking in triple-digit heat found dead in the Mojave Desert

Alene Tchekmedyian, LA Times

Posted: August 13, 2017, 10:30 PM



Visitors walk underneath one of the gazebos at the Amboy Crater off Route 66 in the Mojave Desert in 2012. (Mark Boster / Los Angeles Times)

Two hikers found dead in blistering heat in Southern California's Mojave Desert were identified as a husband and wife from Yorba Linda, authorities said Sunday.

The couple was discovered Saturday near Amboy Crater, an extinct cinder cone volcano.

Shortly after 1:30 p.m., Kathie Barber, 58, called police saying she was unable to find her husband, with whom she had been hiking since 11 a.m., according to the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department.

She told authorities she had run out of water and that her husband, 60-year-old Gen Miake, had a heart condition.

A helicopter search team went looking for the pair after spotting their car parked in the Amboy Crater trailhead lot.

The couple was spotted about a mile or two east of the trailhead and appeared unresponsive, officials said.

They were 100 yards from each other in the open desert with no shade. Officials estimated the temperature outside was 113 degrees.

The crew flew back to the trailhead to pick up a rescuer with the **San Bernardino County Fire Department** for a second assessment of the couple. Both hikers were pronounced dead at the scene.

<http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-desert-hikers-20170813-story.html>

Two Hikers Found Dead At Amboy Crater Saturday

Z107.7 News

Posted: August 14, 2017

Just five hours after a couple from Yorba Linda started hiking at Amboy Crater, and 2 ½ hours after the woman called for help, saying she and her husband had become separated and were without water, Sheriff's deputies found them dead, about 100 yards apart. According to a Sheriff's report, Kathie Barber, 58, and her husband, Gen Miake, 60, started hiking at Amboy Crater about 11 a.m. Saturday morning when temperatures were in excess of 100 degrees. Barber called 911 in distress about 1:30 p.m., saying she was unable to find her husband, who had a heart condition. She also said she was out of water. Morongo Basin Sheriff's Deputy Nathan Campos was first on the scene, and radioed for assistance from a Sheriff's helicopter. He said the couple's car was at the Amboy Crater trailhead, but he could not determine which direction they had hiked. About 4:05, deputies in the helicopter had located Barber, and Miake was spotted about 100 yards away about 4:20 p.m. They were about one to two miles east of the trailhead. Both appeared unresponsive lying on the ground in the open desert with no shade. Deputies said the temperature was about 113 degrees at the time. A **County Fire** paramedic confirmed that both hikers had died, and a second helicopter was called in to help with recovering their bodies. The Sheriff's Department reminds people that if they are going to hike in the desert during the summer, to hike early in the morning and to bring at least a gallon of water per person.

<http://z1077fm.com/two-hikers-found-dead-at-amboy-crater-saturday/>

Firefighters work in darkness to battle wash fire in Highland

Jim Steinberg, The Sun

Posted: August 12, 2017, 10:42 PM



A wash fire near Highland Avenue and Victoria Avenue in Highland prompted a response from 45 firefighters from three department. Photo by Jim Steinberg, Staff

A wash fire near Highland Avenue and Victoria Avenue in Highland prompted a response from 45 firefighters from three departments.

The blaze, about a mile south of the San Manuel Casino, is not threatening any structures, said **San Bernardino County** Battalion Chief Chris Gorman.

The cause of the fire is under investigation, Gorman said.

Cal Fire and fire units from the San Manuel reservation are assisting.

<http://www.sbsun.com/general-news/20170812/firefighters-work-in-darkness-to-battle-wash-fire-in-highland>

Fire burns old store on Highway 173 in Hesperia

Victor Valley News Group

Posted: August 13, 2017



The old Silverwood Country Store destroyed by fire Sunday afternoon. (Gabriel D. Espinoza, Victor Valley News)

HESPERIA, Calif. (VVNG.com) An old vacant store along Highway 173 was destroyed by a vegetation fire Sunday afternoon.

The fire was reported at 12:13 p.m. as a small brush fire that quickly grew to about 10 acres, the San Bernardino National Forest firefighters said in a tweet.

The fire is being referred to as the “Store Fire” after it destroyed the old Silverwood Country Store.

“I have received over 25 phone calls this afternoon from people asking me if I was ok, they thought my store burned down,” said the owner of the new Silverwood Country store that relocated years ago a short distance away.

Fire officials said the forward rate of spread has been stopped and the fire is now contained.

However, the road will remain closed for at least three hours due to some burned electricity poles that need to be replaced, CHP officials told Victor Valley News.

The **San Bernardino County Fire Department**, Cal Fire, San Bernardino National Forest, and the Apple Valley Fire Protection District worked on battling the blaze.

Highway 173 is closed from Highway 138 to Lake Arrowhead Road. The cause of the fire remains under investigation.

<http://www.vvng.com/fire-burns-old-store-highway-173-hesperia/>

San Bernardino fire

Highland News

Posted: August 14, 2017, 11:10 AM



Photo by Christy Harbour

On Saturday, Aug. 12, at 9:17 p.m., fire was reported in a drainage ditch in the 2600 block of Rockford in San Bernardino. CalFire Battalion Chief John Toon, who serves as Highland's fire chief, reports Highland Fire Department assisted **County fire Department** in battling the blaze, which burned about six acres. The cause is under investigation.

http://www.highlandnews.net/news/breaking_news/san-bernardino-fire/article_cfb04262-811b-11e7-b08d-f76229ca949c.html