



THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

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SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

420,424 ACRES BURNED | 1,100 HOMES DESTROYED | 560,000 EVACUATED

DEVASTATION

Small, sweet victory on fire lines

By GUY KOVNER

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

ESCONDIDO — In the midst of the Witch fire's fury Tuesday, 16 Sonoma County firefighters scored a small victory, saving four modest homes on a lake near this west San Diego County community.

As the wind-whipped fire burned 17 homes to the ground near Lake Hodges, a San Diego city reservoir, the strike team led by Windsor Battalion Chief David Cornelissen headed up Beech Lane, each engine assigned to a house not yet engulfed in flames.

The engine crews from Sonoma Valley, Gold Ridge, Occidental and Rancho Adobe each saved a home, judiciously directing water from the 500-gallon tank aboard each truck.

"All the houses (we took) are still standing," said Capt. Mike Stovall of Sonoma Valley, after the two-hour battle was over Tuesday afternoon.

In some cases, the men picked up garden hoses and either poured water on the flames or into their trucks.

"We want to save a little water for us," said Gary Johnson, a Sonoma Valley engineer-paramedic.

Firefighters never want to empty their water tanks, in case they should need some to make their way out.

The malicious Witch fire, deemed the worst fire in San Diego history by San Diego County Sheriff Bill Kolender, surpassing the 2003 Cedar fire, had roared through the area along Del Dios Highway, southwest of Escondido, on Monday.

The Witch fire, so named because it began at Witch Creek near Santa Ysabel, in northeast San Diego County, had de-

TURN TO **VICTORY**, PAGE A12



Brian and Sue Geraci survey the remains of their burned-out Modjeska Canyon home for the first time Tuesday.

ALLEN J. SCHABEN / Los Angeles Times



Firefighter Louis Osuna of the Carlsbad Fire Department takes a break Tuesday after trying to save structures in a rural subdivision while fighting the Witch fire near Escondido. Seventeen homes burned in the area.

KENT PORTER / The Press Democrat

Firefighters vent frustration as winds fan flames

By CHRISTINE HANLEY and JANET WILSON

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Exhausted and sometimes discouraged, firefighters struggled for a third day Tuesday to wrest control of more than a dozen wildfires throughout Southern California that threatened such familiar landmarks as the Mount Palomar Observatory and the resort community of Lake Arrowhead.

Fire crews threw everything they had at the fires, but while there were notable successes, the toll of acreage, homes and lives lost continued to rise — as did the volume of criticism from those who said the region was left unprepared for the cataclysm.

By late Tuesday, the blazes had forced an estimated 560,000 people to flee, burned 420,424 acres and destroyed more than 1,100 homes, making them nearly as large as the fires in October 2003 that are considered the biggest in California history.

"This is the largest mass evacuation of a natural disaster in California history," said Daniel Berlant, spokesman for the state's Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

Although only one death has been directly attributed to the fires, five others have been linked to them in some way.

"If we had more air resources we would have been able to control this fire," said frustrated Orange County Fire Authority Chief Chip Prather. "Instead we've been stuck in this initial attack mode on the ground where we hopscotch through neighborhoods as best we can trying to control things."

Prather spoke at a media briefing Tuesday morning less than a mile from what had been an idyllic residential enclave at Modjeska Canyon in eastern Orange County. As he spoke, the canyon was erupting in an inferno that forced

TURN TO **DEVASTATION**, PAGE A13

Surrounded by fire, family waits, survives

By SCOTT GLOVER and JACK LEONARD

LOS ANGELES TIMES

For more than two hours, the Tinker family sat parked in a minivan on their property above San Pasqual Valley with the motor running and the air conditioning blasting, wondering whether the end was near.

Outside, black smoke engulfed the van, and glowing embers, the size of golf balls, bombarded the vehicle.

"When you see how much rage there is in a fire, that is no place to be," said Henry Tinker, the family patriarch.

While most San Diego County residents were given ample notice from authorities to evacuate their homes, the Tinker family and others in their hilltop neighborhood received no such warnings and were caught by surprise when flames raced up the mountainside around 2 a.m. Monday.

By the time they tried to leave, their phones were dead, the power was out and the fire had blocked all escape routes.

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MAJOR SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA FIRES

- 1. Sedgewick fire:** Los Olivos, Santa Barbara County; 710 acres; 100 percent contained
- 2. Ranch fire:** Castaic/Piru area; 54,518 acres burned; 10 percent contained; 3 homes, 4 outbuildings destroyed
- 3. Magic fire:** Stevenson Ranch Magic Mountain; 1,500 acres; 80 percent contained
- 4. Buckweed fire:** Agua Dulce/Santa Clarita; 37,812 acres; 27 percent contained; 15 homes, 15 outbuildings destroyed; 3 civilians, 1 firefighter injured
- 5. Canyon fire:** Malibu; 4,400 acres; 15 percent contained; 6 homes, 1 church destroyed; 3 firefighters injured
- 6. Little Mountain fire:** San Bernardino; 650 acres; 100 percent contained
- 7. Grass Valley fire:** North Lake Arrowhead; 5,000 acres; 0 percent contained; 175 structures
- 8. Slide fire:** Lake Arrowhead; 5,000 acres; 0 percent contained; 100 structures destroyed

- 9. Santiago fire:** Orange County; 18,000 acres; 30 percent contained; 11 homes, 1 outbuilding destroyed; 4 firefighters injured
- 10. Rice fire:** Fallbrook, northeast San Diego County; 6,100 acres; 0 percent contained; 500 homes destroyed
- 11. Poomacha fire:** northeast San Diego County; 23,000 acres; 0 percent contained; several buildings destroyed; 8 firefighters injured
- 12. Witch fire:** Poway, San Diego County; 200,000 acres; 1 percent contained; 500 houses, 100 businesses, 50 outbuildings destroyed; 2 civilians, 7 firefighters injured
- 13. Harris fire:** Southeast San Diego County; 70,000 acres; 5 percent contained; 200 homes destroyed; 1 civilian killed; 20 civilians, 5 firefighters injured



Source: Los Angeles Times; US Forest Service



SUNNY AND WARM



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