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WILDFIRE COUNTY | PREPARING FOR THE NEXT BIG BLAZE



LEN WOOD, STAFF

Tepusquet Canyon resident Linda Tunnell checks a fire hydrant system she and her husband installed to fight wildfires on their property. Trees have been trimmed up to minimize fire danger.

Tepusquet community a model of fire safety

Firefighter's advice, personal experience pushed preparation

MIKE HODGSON

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While the approaching Alamo fire sparked apprehension and fear in Tepusquet residents, panic wasn't part of the equation — the neighborhood is one of the best prepared for wildfire in the county.

In fact, after completing a fuels treatment project, Tepusquet in 2009 was designated a Model Fire Safe Community.

But it took a fire captain's suggestion, Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council information, a spot fire, a barbecue and the threat of the Zaca fire to bring it to today's level of preparedness.

WILDFIRE COUNTY

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Curtis and Linda Tunnell were introduced to wildfire danger in Tepusquet shortly after they moved to their ranch near the bottom of the canyon in 1987.

Curtis was out near the road cutting pipe to build a corral when a spark ignited dry grass, and the flames began spreading fast.

Curtis ran to the shed to get a shovel while Linda ran for the house to call 911.

"I was thinking, 'My God, if that gets into the creek ...,'" she recalled.

Moments after placing the call, she was surprised to see an army of volunteers attacking the fire.

"I don't know how many neighbors were driving by, stopped and jumped the fence with whatever tools they had or ran to the shed to grab a bucket or whatever," she said. "By the time the Fire Department got here, the fire was out."

The couple decided they needed to do something nice for the community in return, so they put together an address list and sent invitations to everyone to attend a thank-you barbecue.

"That was the start of the Tepusquet Barbecue," she said,

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About this series

Over the course of four days, we look back at tales of evacuation, Tepusquet residents who watched the Alamo fire blacken their canyon home as they fled down narrow access roads; Mission Hills residents who escaped following orders delivered by a first responder with a bullhorn; and campers who, trapped by a wall of flame, were saved by a firefighter leading a convoy on a bulldozer.

We also look forward at how conditions are changing, agencies are preparing and, ultimately, how we can apply lessons learned from those who have witnessed — and survived — a big blaze.

House vote locks in impeachment as issue in '20 Hill races

ALAN FRAM
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The day after nearly every House Democrat voted to impeach President Donald Trump, the chief of the House Republican campaign committee said the political fallout was clear.

"Last night their obsession with impeachment finally came to a head, and they basically ended their majority," Minnesota Rep. Tom Emmer said Thursday. "Max Rose is done," he continued, listing him among freshmen Democrats from districts Trump captured in 2016 who he said won't survive next November's elections.

The feisty Rose, a Brooklyn native and Afghanistan combat veteran with an advanced degree from the London School of Economics, sees things differently. "Mark my words, OK?" said Rose, whose Staten Island-centered district was the only one Trump won in New York City. "We are going to beat them by such a wide margin that next time around, they won't even talk like this again, OK?"

It's too early to say who will be proven correct as Republicans wage a challenging struggle to regain the House majority they lost last year. But less than 11 months from presidential and congressional elections, the near party-line House vote impeaching Trump locked in lawmakers' positions on the subject. Many moderate lawmakers from swing districts had spent months saying they were on the fence.

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FROM THE EDITOR

A Santa Maria Times holiday tradition

The Santa Maria Times for decades has honored a tradition of which we are proud: On Christmas and New Year's days the reporters, editors, pressmen and processors, and your carriers join most Americans in a holiday away from work. These are the people accustomed to working while most other people are off: weekends and holidays.

Continuing the tradition, The Times will have a combined Dec. 24-25 print edition in 2019 and will not have a separate printed newspaper distributed on the morning of Dec. 25. The same will hold true for Jan. 1. The combined editions for Dec. 24-25 and Dec. 31-Jan. 1, which are delivered in time for reading on Christmas and New Year's day, feature a double dose of our regular columns and comics, two entertainment pages, and expanded news and sports reports.

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Planning ahead

Boy Scouts putting lessons learned from Whittier fire to good use in reconstruction

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Just 2½ years after the Whittier fire razed Rancho Alegre Boy Scout Camp and Outdoor School, work is well underway on an \$18 million reconstruction of the camp, with a target date of October 2020 for reopening the Outdoor School.

Los Padres Council officials say the new camp will be better than the old one and will incorporate lessons learned from the Whittier fire as well as new county construction standards.

"We learned a lot about materials that are more sustainable to fire," said Carlos Cortez, Scout executive and CEO.

Glen Goddard, properties manager for the Los Padres Council, agreed.

"We're building things much more fire-resistant," Goddard said, adding that the exterior of the buildings might sacrifice themselves to the flames, but the people inside will be kept safe until rescued.

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Two SIP post panels made of a sandwich of structural board and rigid foam are stacked as a larger roof panel is lifted onto a staff residence under construction at Rancho Alegre Boy Scout Camp. The popular Outdoor School and Scouting facility is rebuilding after virtually total destruction from the Whittier fire in July 2017.

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