

THEN: 1993

ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER SUNDAY

441
Number of homes destroyed or damaged in the fire

Burned homes were all that was left along Caribbean Way in Laguna Beach after a firestorm raced through the area in 1993.

FILE PHOTO: ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER



BRUCE CHAMBERS, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

REMEMBERING THE DAY LAGUNA BEACH BURNED

Twenty years ago, one of the nation's most destructive fires tore through Laguna Canyon into Laguna Beach.

The fire destroyed or damaged 441 homes and burned more than 14,000 acres, ranking seventh on the National Fire Protection Association's list of largest-loss wildland fires. Like a game of hopscotch, Santa Ana winds tossed embers haphazardly - falling on some homes and not others, jumping blocks and neighborhoods.

Laguna Beach was fortunate in some ways. After 12 hours, the wind changed and the fire died down. Firefighters wept. No one died.

In the years since, residents rebuilt, the city enacted tighter building codes, fire-fighting improved, the water supply was increased and aircraft became easier to put into action. Today is the anniversary of the fire. For many, it's a time to remember and a reason to be vigilant. The potential is always there.

NOW
The Caribbean Way neighborhood has been rebuilt and vegetation has grown mature in the past 20 years.

THE FIRESTORM that ravaged the city taught firefighting lessons, built resolve among residents and proved a community could fight back.

STORIES AND A GRAPHIC TIMELINE ON NEWS 25-32

FREE ONLINE MASS EDUCATION DRAWS SKEPTICISM



UC Irvine is studying the effectiveness of the classes.

STORY BY SCOTT MARTINDALE ON NEWS 4

NEXT MAGAZINE INSIDE TODAY

LESSONS FROM THE DEEP



EUGENE GARCIA, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Cashier Claire Mushen, 90, jokes with Jack in the Box district manager Armando Pineda in San Clemente. Mushen has been working for the chain for 25 years.

CASHIER RINGS UP THE YEARS

If Claire Mushen says she's going to do something, she does it.

Most likely though, she'll do it without saying anything. The last thing she wants is attention.

Still, you can't help but notice Claire. She's smart, honest, loyal. She looks great in a hairnet.

At work, she knows the value of effort and a smile. When relaxing, she believes in the value of a good martini.

Her bosses call her ideal; her children call her their hero.

She's one of the best workers they have at Jack in the Box.

And she's only 90.

STORY BY THERESA WALKER ON NEWS 8

INSIDE

TIPS FOR MOVE-UP HOMEBUYERS

Agents, mortgage brokers and homebuilders offer advice to homeowners looking to trade up. **REAL ESTATE 1**

NSA TACTICS IMPERIL FOREIGN RELATIONS

International anger over disclosures of U.S. snooping abroad shows no signs of abating. **NEWS 22**

Fire agency chief Richter says buck stops with him



Sunday Columnist David Whiting, **NEWS 7**

72/58 | 80/55
Coast | Inland

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LAGUNA FIRE: 20 YEARS LATER

REAL FEAR OF REPEAT

Steps to avoid a recurrence blaze can rule out only so much risk.



JOANNA CLAY REGISTER WRITER

There are people in Laguna Beach who remember what it was like 20 years ago today.

The cobalt sky was stained gray. Flames 100 feet high barreled from the canyon. Winds whipped at up to 92 mph. People wandered downtown in mouth masks, eyes peeking through ash-covered skin.

"It's like war. It's like somebody dropped a bomb on the city," Brian Governor said in 1993.

They thought they'd stand at Main Beach and watch the flames devour

their land, their schools, their homes. They thought it was the end of Laguna.

But it wasn't. That day serves as a poignant reminder of what could happen again - but hopefully never will.

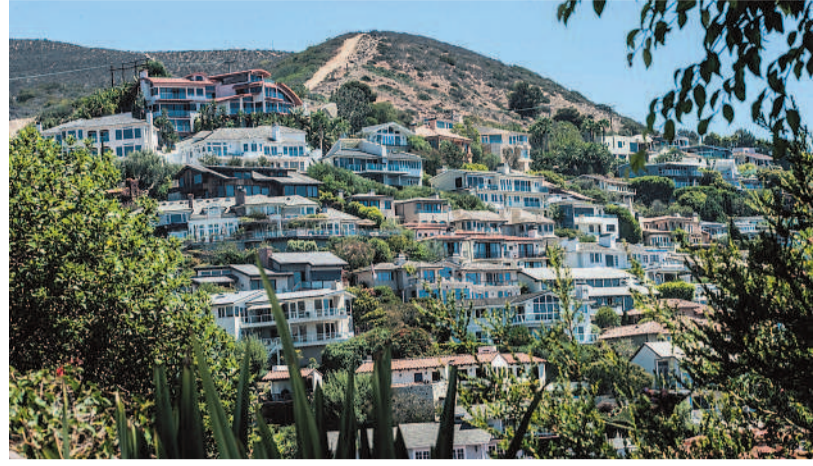
"I made it clear: Any more water than what we had could have helped, whatever that means," Fire Chief Rich Dewberry said in 1993.

There was frustration after the fire. Firefighters said there wasn't enough water. Residents shook fists

at the City Council over a 3 million-gallon reservoir that had been voted down. It could have added nearly three hours of firefighting, according to Register reports.

But things have changed since 1993.

Residents can't build homes with shake shingle roofs. Firefighters have better training, apparatus, communication and mutual-aid agreements. The water district has two more reservoirs and backup gen-



BRUCE CHAMBERS, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER
Emerald Bay homes are close together on terraced streets. In 1993, the Laguna Beach fire destroyed many homes in this neighborhood.

SEE LAGUNA • PAGE 28

CHAPLAIN



FILE: BRUCE STRONG, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

A CALL TO HELP THE HURTING

Experiences and faith gave chaplain strength as he offered comfort.

BREA • Rex Spragins still sees images of residents digging through charred rubble. He remembers comforting a man so beaten down and broken-hearted he couldn't talk, so he just laid hands on him and prayed. He still smells the acrid smell of burn in the air.

"To me it was like going to an area of multiple deaths and people

were just grieving," said Spragins, a chaplain with the La Habra Police Department. "It was an area of total devastation. It's like going into a home where a loved one is dead. You had a similar situation. Some were hysterical, others numb and some couldn't talk to you. It was dealing with people who were just hurting."

Spragins prayed with residents; he brought them food and water. He cared for them and talked with those who wanted to talk. Personal experiences helped him relate to those who were suffering. Unlike some of his cases in La Habra, everyone in Laguna



CINDY YAMANAKA, THE REGISTER

"It's like going into a home where a loved one is dead," Spragins recalls of his work with devastated residents.

Chaplain Rex Spragins consoles Karl Davison as he inspects the ruins of his parents' Laguna Beach home after it was destroyed in the October 1993 fire-storm.

SEE CHAPLAIN • PAGE 27

Rat and Termite Season is Here

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LENDING A HAND

Dave Day recalls the fire as he stands near the area where he and his brother parked their mobile coffee truck and served free coffee and treats to firefighters. The experience helped lead to Growers First, a foundation that works with coffee-growing families in Mexico and Central America.



ED CRISOSTOMO, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

COMMUNITY LEADER

A GUIDE EMERGES FROM DISASTER

Frustration moved resident to help lead Laguna Beach as it healed and rebuilt itself.

By JOANNA CLAY
ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

The 1993 Laguna fire left residents confused and frustrated. They needed answers. David Horne felt that if he didn't step up, maybe no one would.

"I saw the mayor and I said, 'Well, what are you going to do about all this stuff?'"

Mayor Lida Lenney responded, "I don't know. What would you do?" he said.

"What would I do? I'm just a guy. You know, you're the mayor," he responded.

But then he asked then-City Manager Ken Frank for permission to hold a meeting at City Hall a few days after the fire. He wanted to do something. He thought if there were organization, some focus, it would calm people.

"I thought maybe 10 or 12 people would show up," he said. "City Hall was filled. There were probably 150 people, maybe more."

That's when he rose to lead the Greater Laguna Coast Fire Safe Council, as it is known today. When it was unclear how insurance claims

SEE LEADER • PAGE 27

COFFEE AND COMPASSION

By ERIKA I. RITCHIE
ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

LAGUNA BEACH • For 48 hours straight, Dave Day never stopped pouring mochas, cappuccinos, lattes, espressos and black coffee.

Twenty years ago, he and his brother, Jeff, operated Captain Caffeine, a mobile coffeehouse in the days before Starbucks came on scene. They had three bright-

As the fire roared, two brothers pitched in to keep exhausted crews fueled with caffeine.

red, copper-trimmed trucks, and they drove them to trendy surf-company headquarters, USC tailgating parties, concerts and high-powered offices at the Irvine Spectrum – all before the mobile cuisine trucks took over the streets.

But just hours into what would turn out to be one of the

nation's most devastating fires, the Day brothers' high-end brew would be applied to a more noble cause – a two-day event that would ge their lives.

On Oct. 27, Dave Day had just finished a delivery in Costa Mesa when he heard that access to Laguna Beach was being blocked. Laguna was on fire. He raced south to Crown Valley Parkway, hitching a ride on a tree-trimmer truck. The only people being let in were those with power saws to cut down trees. The fire had just started to jump Laguna Canyon Road.

He checked on his home in Arch Beach Heights, several miles from the fire. He found his two dogs and retrieved artwork and family photos. Most of the town had been evacuated. Day called his brother and told him to grab all the coffee and food they had and try to get the coffee truck to Main Beach.

Jeff Day drove the truck straight down Laguna Canyon Road. Charred eucalyptus, pine

and palm trees dotted the landscape. Fire hoses covered the road. Dave Day jumped on a skateboard and rolled to Main Beach. The brothers parked their truck next to a small Red Cross vehicle and began serving coffee to exhausted firefighters.

"It was really ominous; everything seemed almost black and white," Dave Day said. "Fire embers caught in palm trees, and the ball of fire would just scream sideways and travel a city block."

"It was amazing to see the hills all on fire. We started serving mochas, lattes and cappuccinos. The guys were laughing and saying, 'Only in Laguna can you come fight a fire and have a latte.' The firefighters were incredibly appreciative. I started getting to know them as the latte guy and the cappuccino guy."

In 12 hours, the Days went through all their resources – 75 pounds of coffee. They'd given out every bagel, muffin and croissant. But still, exhausted firefighters were everywhere.

The brothers restocked.

"Some firefighters came in covered by orange retardant – that's when you knew how gnarly it was," Dave Day said.

Dave Day said he often wakes up thinking about that day and the acrid smell of a thousand things burning. It was a horrible event, but Dave Day was proud he could help in some way.

"When I think of the fire, I don't think of the houses burning, I think of the firefighters and their service," he said.

Ultimately, the Day brothers sold their mobile coffee business. Service is what inspired Dave Day to found Growers First Foundation. He and foundation volunteers travel to rural farming families in the mountains of southern Mexico and Central America several times a year and mentor them. Day's goal is to enhance their lives and help them become productive members of society.

"No matter what you do, it's important to make time to pay it back or pay it forward," Dave Day said.

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JEFF ANTENORE, FOR THE REGISTER

Emerald Bay resident David Horne stands at a spot above a canyon that burned in 1993 that now serves as one of the vantage points for the Red Flag Patrol fire watch he helped set up.

LEADER: Group focuses on preparation

FROM PAGE 26

would be sorted out, the group divided up by carrier. A business professor met with insurance providers – with a friendly, cooperative approach, as Horne described it – and they responded.

Horne jokingly faxed the governor and the president about the safety council meetings. They responded – too busy, but thanks for the invite, they said. Then someone from the California Department of Insurance showed up. A

“Everything I owned at one point fit in a couple of dumpsters as ashes.”

DAVID HORNE

Cal Fire representative attended. Some U.S. Forest Service employees heard about the meetings and made the trek.

The council became a model for the state. It launched the Red

Flag Patrol, one of a handful of such volunteer groups in the state at the time. Horne applied for grant funding to get training like remote sensing with cameras.

While Horne helped others, he was also dealing with the loss of his own home.

As the flames approached his Mystic Hills neighborhood, his wife – also a business professor – was cool and collected, he said. The couple had used all they had to buy that home five years prior. He remembered having only

enough cash left over to buy a gallon of paint for the garage door.

“She walked around the house before we left, taking photos so she could say ‘This is how we live,’ ” he said.

Two decades later, Horne handed the council’s leadership to another Laguna resident, but he’s on the city’s Emergency Disaster Preparedness Committee, still leading the patrol. For the last 10 years, he has hosted emergency drills at

Emerald Bay, where he lives. His preparedness rubbed off on others, like committee member Sandi Cain, who hosts drills in Laguna Terrace.

The fire changed Horne’s perspective. At the end of the day, no one died, he said.

“I mean, I’m still materialistic. I’ve got my fancy phone and duds,” he said, pointing at his suit. “But you realize it’s just stuff. Everything I owned at one point fit in a couple of dumpsters as ashes. Everything we were able to save was thrown in the back of the car.”

Outsiders probably wonder what keeps people in Laguna Beach, or at least a stone’s throw from it.

But the fire didn’t make the Hornes flinch about staying near town.

“When you arrive, you have to go through either the canyon, which is a wilderness, or Coast Highway. You drive there, and it’s like an oasis,” he said. “You get there and you’re like ‘Ah, I’m home.’ ”

CHAPLAIN

FROM PAGE 25

Beach was suffering together.

Through his own experiences, Spraggins gave faith and hope. It was the first major catastrophe he and other chaplains from a newly formed countywide chaplain program responded to.

Spraggins is proud of that.

“The fact that you can help people, that’s what keeps me going,” said Spraggins, who for decades has responded to tragedies. “Looking at the houses that burned, you wonder why some weren’t touched. People lost everything they had, but they could recover. With a death, you can’t recover because you always have that loss. I never tell someone I know how they feel, but I pray for them. I rely on prayer and the spirit of God more than anything else. He gives me the power to carry through.”

Spraggins knows the pain of loss firsthand. He lost his son Robert at 25 to a viral heart infection. Then there were others he loved and lost. Those life experiences, he said, provided him compassion and ultimately led him to the Lord.

He grew up in Texon, Texas, a small oil-company town midway between Odessa and Midland. He was the youngest of five children, and his father worked as a pumper and switcher. Plymouth Oil provided for the town, but life was sparse.

Still, he credits the sense of community and growing up among diverse faiths as the foundation that has given him what his wife, Janet, calls “a preacher’s heart.”

“He has a heart of compassion,” Janet Spraggins said. “He can get beyond tragedy and touch people.”

Rex Spraggins left the company town at 18 and joined the Marines. In the 1950s, he went to work at a gas station and later bought gas stations in La Habra. But

something was missing. An experience with the death of a family member, he said, put him in touch with God.

“I felt the power of God,” he said. “I couldn’t get away from it once I tasted the spirit of the Lord.”

Spraggins attended churches looking for the right fit. In Corona, he was drawn to the Apostolic Tabernacle and started studying the Bible. But with no church like that in La Habra, Spraggins prayed that someone would come to the city and minister.

“I told God I’d help,” he said. “He found someone, and it turned out to be me. I didn’t want to pastor, but it wouldn’t go away. I got permission to start a church in La Habra and used my business to finance it.”

But Spraggins continued to feel a calling – he wanted to minister to police officers. They get the “bull end of everything,” he said.

In 1990, when the La Habra Police Department agreed to start a chaplain program, Spraggins sold his business and when to work for the city and began recruiting other chaplains. The chaplains were trained in post-traumatic stress disorder and working with police officers and city residents. He dealt with killings, suicides, home deaths and children’s deaths. For some, that type of pastoring wasn’t a good fit.

“In pastoring in a disaster like the Laguna fire or to people involved in police tragedies, you have to be able to relate to them in a closer way. There are pastors who go to school and get trained, but they don’t have the life experiences.

“With a pastor’s heart, you do all you can, and then you walk away. In Laguna, it was the overall devastation that affected me most, I carry that experience with me.”

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FILE PHOTO: ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER
Armande Greiger returns to what was left of her home on Bounty Way after the Laguna Beach firestorm in 1993.

LAGUNA: Fire always looms as threat to city

FROM PAGE 25

erators. City Hall has tighter regulations and uses disaster simulations to prepare. Community members take initiative and educate the public on fire danger.

Residents understand that living in this seaside paradise comes at a cost. It has been torn apart by natural disasters – floods, fire and landslides. Laguna Beach is unlike any other city in the county – surrounded by wildlands and hilly topography with only two roads in and out. Just last year, a 4-acre brush fire broke out behind Ruby's Diner.

Fire is still on the mind. The state has had 1,000 more fires than at the same time last year, officials said. Laguna Beach had only 3 inches of rain this year – 7 inches less than its average. Its hillsides are dead, Fire Chief Jeff LaTendresse said.

But some just don't get it. Firefighters recently found evidence that someone launched sky lanterns in Top of the World park, sending burning matches floating above Laguna's dry hillsides.

This summer, juveniles started a bonfire in the wilderness park, people were found using sparklers during a photo shoot, and a car's backfire started a small fire – all in Laguna Canyon. The incidents are within 3 miles of where the 1993 blaze started, LaTendresse said.

In a town of only 12 firefighters, Laguna Beach can't ignore public indifference. Firefighters rely on the public to be as vigilant as ever – not create a catastrophe.

Since 1993, many Lagunans have taken preparedness into their own hands.

A group of volunteers known as the Red Flag Patrol affix magnetic stickers to their cars and hang flags from their windows, spreading the word about fire conditions.

The city's Emergency Disaster Preparedness Committee recommends regulations that could help in a disaster. Better signage on city streets could help mutual-aid responders unfamiliar with the town, its members say. The group recently met with Los Angeles City Fire Department about parking regulations on red-flag days, to see if they would help in Laguna Beach.

A new program will put volunteers who have completed community emergency response team training within Laguna Coast Wilderness Park and Alta Laguna Park in hopes of informing the public and deterring criminal behavior.

“You just have to let it go,” Laguna Beach resident Wave Baker said in 1993. “It's not in my power. It's in the power of the wind and the fire.”

The city can't stop a wildfire from happening, but Laguna Beach has worked to ensure that its hillsides, its homes and its infrastructure don't act as fuel.



FILE: ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER
Greg Kearns battles the flames with a garden hose in Laguna Beach in October 1993. Homes built or remodeled now face tougher codes, but many homes have not been improved.



FILE: ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER
Laguna Beach resident Robert Ahlke Jr., right, and Bill Balalaika defy encroaching flames to save their home on Pinecrest Drive. The home made it through the 1993 firestorm.

The city has continually expanded its efforts to prevent fires in Laguna – like expanding its fuel break program, making its building code more stringent and examining undergrounding in the canyon.

Goats, allowed to graze since 1990, have had their chomping grounds expanded throughout Laguna's hillsides. Goats and hand crews have removed vegetation from some 320 acres in 14 fuel modification zones. The city plans to expand these zones over the course of three years.

While the city can control public land, controlling how far homeowners go to protect themselves proves difficult.

In the months following the 1993 fire, fireproofing was critical. That year, Laguna Beach led the state in tough building codes, the city said. While new or remodeled homes follow tight rules – with boxed-in eaves, double-pane glass and stucco walls – many homes built under the older rules have not been improved.

Matt Lawson, a member of the Emergency Disaster Preparedness Committee, says one resident's preparedness is only as good as the neighbors'. During the 1993 fire, embers fell haphazardly on homes – skipping a block or even a neighborhood, he said.

“I think people who own older homes, particularly in

teries are Coast Highway and Laguna Canyon Road. While it doesn't have control over the highway, the city is aiming to make the canyon road safer by moving utilities underground and looking at adding additional lanes. Not only can utility poles hinder evacuation, they can serve as ignition.

Laguna learned this on Sept. 16, 2012. Fire investigators determined a Southern California Edison pole as the source of the small brush fire that required roughly 170 firefighters to control. The utility gave the city \$63,403 but didn't accept fault for the fire.

“Their goal, I think, is just widespread destruction,” Dr. Kenneth R. Fineman, a Huntington Beach psychologist who treats fire-setters, said of arson in 1993.

But neither utility poles nor a car backfire caused the 1993 Laguna wildfire – it was an arsonist, authorities determined. A suspect was identified but never arrested due to lack of evidence.

The case is still open. That fear – the fear of human nature – still stirs in firefighters when the Santa Ana winds perk up, the brush is dead and the air is dry. Fifty percent of fires are started by arsonists, according to a Laguna Beach investigator.

“When fires start burning, people get weird,” LaTendresse said of arsonists. “It's our worst nightmare.”

More than ever before, residents are the eyes and ears for public safety – hopefully causing someone with malicious thoughts to think twice, LaTendresse said. He hopes the improvements – like expanded fuel break zones, red-flag programs and further regulations – can prevent the worst from occurring.

“I think we knew the potential was there and reality occurred that day. We've been fortunate since 1993,” LaTendresse said. “Never say never.”

Evacuation is tricky in the coastal town, whose only ar-

CONTACT THE WRITER:
949-492-5135 or
jclay@ocregister

Twenty years ago, a combination of situations and conditions contributed to the most destructive fire in Orange County history.

CHRONICLE OF A CATASTROPHE

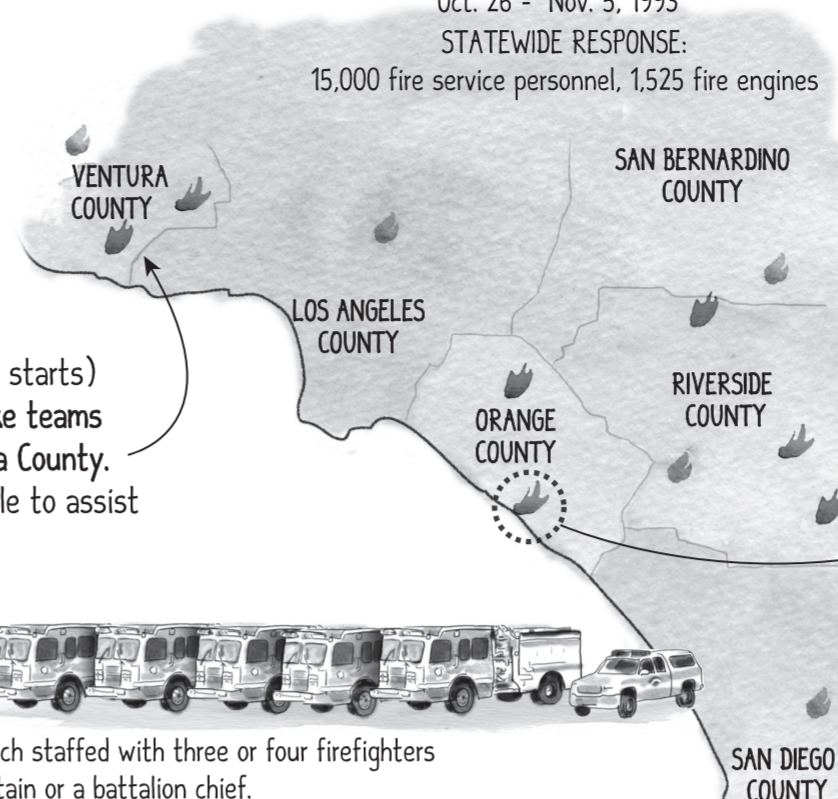
By SHARON HENRY
Orange County Register

Oct. 26, 5 p.m. (20 hours before Laguna Beach fire starts)
Two Orange County Fire Department (OCFD*) strike teams are dispatched to the Green Meadow fire in Ventura County. They will be committed to this fire until Oct. 31, unable to assist in the Laguna Beach disaster.



A STRIKE TEAM is made up of five engines, each staffed with three or four firefighters and a lead vehicle with a captain or a battalion chief. Each fire crew carries enough food, water and supplies to work and sleep near a fire line for two days.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
MAJOR WILDFIRES
Oct. 26 - Nov. 5, 1993
STATEWIDE RESPONSE:
15,000 fire service personnel, 1,525 fire engines



Oct. 27:
11:50 a.m.
CALL TO 911
Two Southern California Edison workers first spot a brushfire and try to put it out. They nearly succeed.

11:58 a.m. (8 min. into fire)
INACCESSIBLE TERRAIN
OCFD is on scene – more water tenders are ordered.

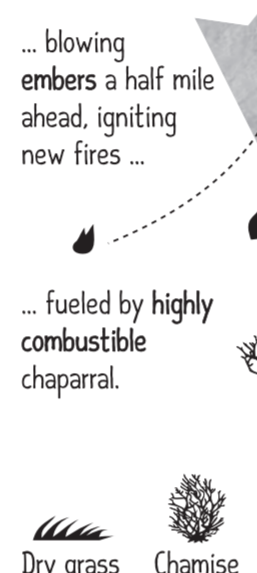


Used when no fire hydrants are available – holds 1,800 gallons of water, pumps 500 to 750 gallons per minute.

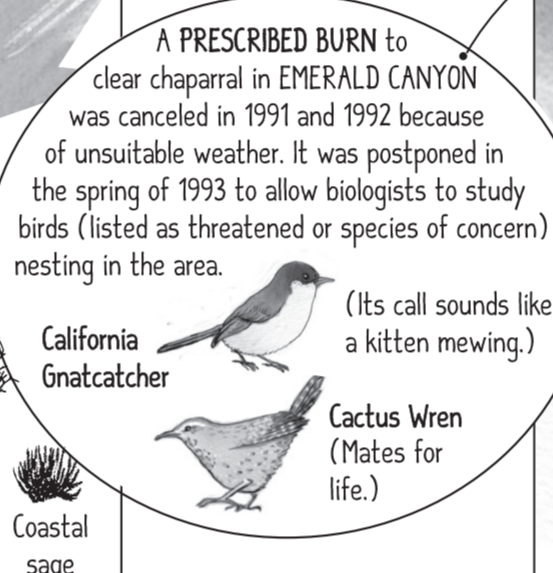
12:15 p.m. (25 min.)
FIRE IS SPREADING
Eight air tankers are requested, but all are currently committed to other fires. It'll be another 90 minutes before air support arrives. By then the fire will be out of control.

*Later became Orange County Fire Authority. (OCFA)

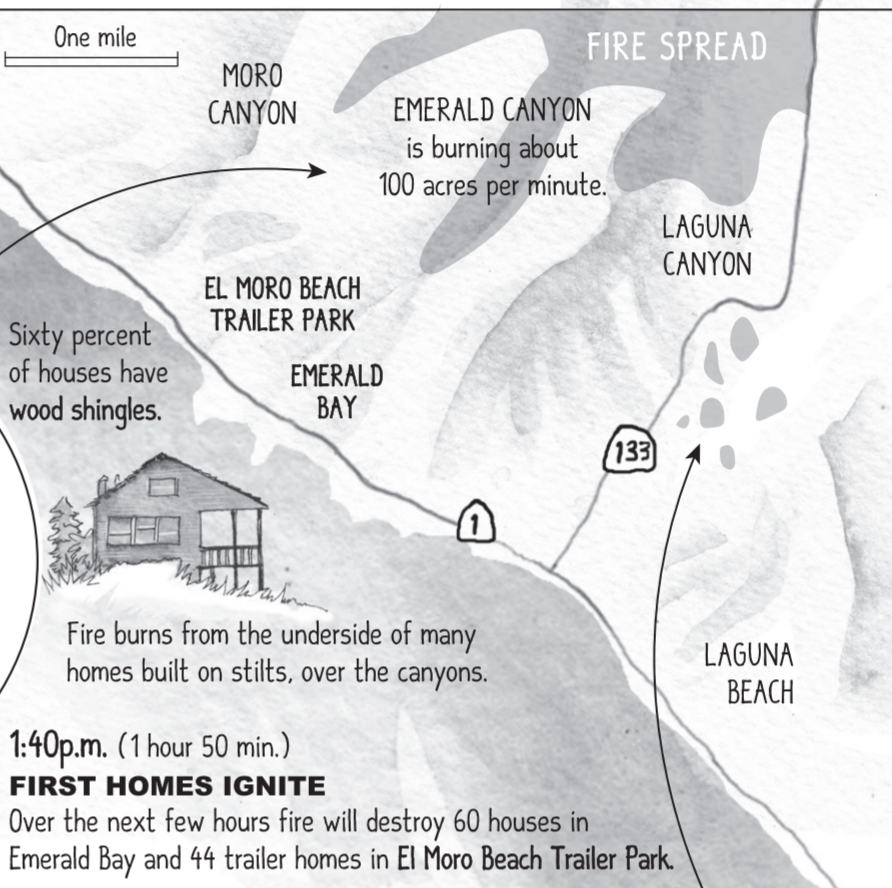
12:20 p.m. (30 min.)
WINDS INTENSIFY
Hot, dry, Santa Ana winds whip through the canyons, stripping moisture from vegetation and ...



1:29 p.m. (39 min.)
EVACUATION ORDERED
Fire is racing through canyons, toward coastal communities. Emerald Bay's 3,500 residents are ordered to evacuate.



A PRESCRIBED BURN to clear chaparral in EMERALD CANYON was canceled in 1991 and 1992 because of unsuitable weather. It was postponed in the spring of 1993 to allow biologists to study birds (listed as threatened or species of concern) nesting in the area.



1:40 p.m. (1 hour 50 min.)
FIRST HOMES IGNITE
Over the next few hours fire will destroy 60 houses in Emerald Bay and 44 trailer homes in El Moro Beach Trailer Park.

1:24 p.m. (1 hour 34 min.)
STRIKE TEAMS REQUESTED: 25
ON SCENE: 10
NOT YET AVAILABLE: 15

1:39 p.m. (1 hour 49 min.)
Fire radios, handlines and cell service fail after being overwhelmed with traffic.

1:47 p.m. (1 hour 57 min.)
AIR TANKER ARRIVES
Most effective: When fire is over large wilderness areas.
Least effective: In residential areas, in high winds.

RETARDANT
Water: 85%
Fertilizer: 10%
Iron oxide (for red color): 5%
Severe turbulence and heavy smoke restricts drops to a limited area. Retardant isn't dropped on a fire, it's dropped in front of a fire.

FIRE CAPTAIN



BRUCE CHAMBERS, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER
Bing Boka, a Laguna Beach fire captain during the 1993 firestorm, looks through a copy of the Register he saved from the day after flames swept through the area.

SCARRED BY FIRE, HE HAD TO MOVE ON

Guilt stuck with firefighter who needed reassurance that he and his colleagues couldn't save everything.

By JOANNA CLAY
ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

A box sat in a shed behind Bing Boka's house unopened for 19 years. But then a couple of weeks ago, he brought it out and arranged the magazines, maps and newspaper clippings from that day on the coffee table in the living room of his Laguna Beach house.

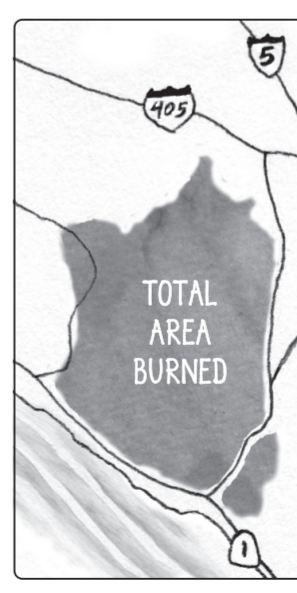
he experienced the Paseo Grande fire – what he calls the closest call in his whole life. “I fought a lot of fires ... but this one always stayed with me. It left a scar right here,” he said of the Laguna fire, pointing to his head. “I don't know why. Maybe it's because it's my home.”



The Register from Oct. 28, 1993

Oct. 28, 6 p.m. (30 hours)
The fire is declared contained.

Oct. 31, 1993
(Four days into fire)
The fire is declared controlled – 57 strike teams (306 engines), 12 air tankers, 10 helicopters, 1,968 firefighters assisted.



IN THE END
14,337 acres burned
441 homes destroyed
\$528 million in damage
0 fatalities

A General Accounting Office report to Congress concluded the destruction was caused mainly by:
• Wind conditions
• Inaccessible terrain
• Lack of water pressure
• Homeowners' failure to fireproof their homes.

bought in the 1930s. When he was a kid, the population was about 5,000, he said. Everyone knew his folks – his father worked at the lumberyard off Forest Avenue, and his mother worked at the phone company.

In the late '50s, Boka graduated from Laguna Beach High School and met surf buddy Hobie Alter – who would become a legend in the surf industry. In 1959, Boka won the Brooks Street Surfing Classic, the oldest continuously running surf contest in the country. He shaped surfboards for Alter before leaving to work at boat-

yards in Costa Mesa. His brother, Jim Boka, was a firefighter and urged him to consider becoming one. After two years as a volunteer, he was hired full time in Laguna in 1967.

“I understand that. This doesn't,” he said, pointing to his head again. He retired five years after the fire. Some days he stops by the fire station and grabs coffee with new guys and the few he still knows.

“It's like war. It's like somebody dropped a bomb on the city.”
BRIAN GOVOR IN 1993

“You just have to let it go. It's not in my power. It's in the power of the wind and the fire.”
LAGUNA BEACH RESIDENT WAVE BAKER IN 1993

“I think we knew the potential was there and reality occurred that day. We've been fortunate since 1993. Never say never.”
FIRE CHIEF JEFF LATENDRESSE

“It was an area of total devastation. ... Some were hysterical, others numb and some couldn't talk to you. It was dealing with people who were just hurting.”
FIRE CHAPLAIN REX SPRAGGINS