

Off The Fringe



In The Line of Fire

SAN DIEGO AREA SUPERINTENDENTS BEGIN REBUILDING AFTER WILDFIRES SUBSIDE

By David Frabotta, Senior Editor

It's simultaneously one of the most awesome and frightening phenomenon on Earth. But Dave Buckles refused to get out of its path.

Buckles had no idea what his day would entail when he left for work on Monday morning, Oct. 22, to go to his job as superintendent of Rancho Bernardo Golf Resort and Spa near San Diego. Southern California wildfires raged, but Buckles figured his resort was out of harm's way.

About 500,000 acres burned from Los Angeles to south of San Diego for almost two weeks in late October. The wildfires, totaling 23 at one point, forced about 1 million people from their homes. More than 2,000 homes and commercial structures were damaged.

Almost 500 homes were lost in Rancho Bernardo, including one on the golf course of the Rancho Bernardo Golf Resort and Spa. But it could have been worse if it wasn't for Buckles, assistant superintendent Esteban Chavez and six others from his crew. They helped beat back flames from neighboring homes with garden hoses and hustle. They are credited with saving at least six homes from destruction, and Buckles could have saved many more by creating an impromptu firebreak by quickly clearing an access road that had filled with brush.

Eventually, firefighters came through to relieve Buckles and his crew. But across

Wildfires leveled Pala Mesa's maintenance building. Distributors chipped in to get it mowing again.

town, there would be no rescue for parts of the Pala Mesa Golf Course and Resort.

Superintendent Mark Louder expected to see only wreckage when he arrived at work Oct. 23. The resort was evacuated the day before, and the news had reported that the resort was leveled.

"At that point I began to wonder if I still had a job," Louder said.

But when Louder arrived at the property, he realized news reports had been exaggerated. Most of the course was unscathed.

"The only buildings that

Santa Ana winds pushed wildfire across I-15 and through the Pala Mesa Resort. Luckily, the only turf damage was around the perimeter, but plenty of trees perished.

were lost were, of course, my maintenance facility with all my equipment and the human resources/accounting building," he said.

All of the resort's equipment burned in the inferno, including his central control system for irrigation. He had just overseeded wall to wall, so he was in a bit of a pickle. Luckily, Toro overnighted him a new system, and Turf Star created an irrigation program for him.

In addition, Turf Star, Golf Ventures West and AA Equipment offered loaner equipment to get him mowing again.

Damage from the 23 fires is expected to exceed \$2 billion. Thousands of people in the San Diego area have begun rebuilding their homes and lives.

And some will send thank-you cards to the Rancho Bernardo golf course maintenance crew. ■

