

Monthly Message from the Chief

Monthly Message from Chief Pimlott February 2012



As you are all aware, after almost a year, CAL FIRE was successful in obtaining approval from the Administration to re-implement the Recruitment and Retention differential for the Department's Chief Officers. This was the result of the best efforts of a number of staff from our Human Resources Unit, the Natural Resources Agency, the Department of Personnel Administration, the Department of Finance, and CDF Firefighters. As a result of the inversion of pay between the Battalion Chief and Assistant Chief classifications, we were facing a 35 percent vacancy rate in the Chief Officer classes. This inversion resulted in a significant impact throughout the organization on day to day supervision as well as overall administration of programs and units, and coordination with local cooperators. Addressing this issue was a high priority for me, and I am gratified by the meaningful dialogue across agencies which occurred to bring this issue to resolution.

Everyone involved knew, despite the critical need for the Recruitment and Retention differential, there would be public perception issues during these challenging fiscal times. Within a week of its approval, an inquiry from the media was initiated regarding the subject. That following Thursday, the story ran on the front page of a large, influential newspaper. Though the story was fair and balanced, I am keenly aware of the prevailing perception about public servants and their compensation. I prepared myself that morning for a day filled with potential criticism from the public, additional media and other entities.

Instead, the day unfolded in a very different manner. While picking up coffee in the morning, a man approached me and commented on my uniform. He looked at me and said "you must be proud to work for CAL FIRE and wear that patch." A bit stunned but elated, I answered yes and smiled. He looked back at me and said "you should be very proud."

Shortly thereafter, during a meeting with two members of the Trinity County Board of Supervisors, they repeatedly told me how much they valued their relationship with CAL FIRE and how important we are to their county.

That afternoon, I viewed a KQED Bay Area Public Television news story about CAL FIRE's Helitack program. The reporter did a feature piece on Tom Humann, one of our pilots at Boggs Mountain Helitack and former Marine One pilot for President Bush. The story was well done and showcased CAL FIRE in a very positive and professional light.

Later, between meetings, PIO staff asked me to preview a serial docu-drama following four CAL FIRE employees in the course of their jobs and home lives titled "Lives on Fire". The production quality is excellent and the producers are very effective at relaying their stories for the audience through video and interviews. The series is set to air on the Oprah Winfrey Network later this month and I'm excited for the world to get a glimpse of who we are and what we do.

When I arrived home later that evening, I caught the end of a KCRA Channel 3 NBC story on the International Aerial Firefighting conference held at McClellan Park during the week. At the conclusion of the story, the news anchors quoted the event organizers commenting that the conference was a success and that experts had come from all over the globe to view and learn from CAL FIRE's world class aviation program.

I know these comments and activities are nothing new but they really hit home for me occurring all in one day. My initial expectation of criticism that day never occurred because despite the tough fiscal climate and ongoing challenges, the job you do is resonating with people. CAL FIRE is recognized for the services we provide and for what we represent - strength, professionalism, integrity and credibility. I applaud all of you for keeping the faith and persevering through times of adversity.

Chief Ken Pimlott
CAL FIRE Director