

Monthly Message from the Chief

July 2013

It's been a difficult time for the fire service. In the span of five weeks, we lost United States Forest Service Smokejumper Luke Sheehy; the 19 Granite Mountain Hotshots, including Christopher MacKenzie, the son of retired CAL FIRE Captain Mike MacKenzie; and our own Fire Apparatus Engineer/Paramedic Christopher Douglas from the Riverside Unit. Through all of this tragedy, I am deeply heartened by the selfless commitment of so many. Most importantly, although we may not have personally known any of these individuals, we as a Department together grieved their loss.



During this time, you all continued to honor their memory by doing what the public expects us to do. Initial attack activity was unusually heavy throughout the 4th of July holiday weekend and Incident Management Team One was deployed to the Chariot Fire in San Diego Unit. Thank you for keeping your focus on responding to the thousands of emergency calls for service that did not stop while we grieved. That is what they all would have wanted and the best tribute to who they were.

In addition to the support by various programs, Units and both regions, I would like to acknowledge several individuals and groups for their significant contributions to the events over the last several weeks:

- The Riverside Unit was ground zero as the Department paid tribute to Christopher MacKenzie, whose father retired from the Unit, and then faced the tragedy of losing Christopher Douglas. Throughout, Unit Chief John Hawkins and staff from the Unit handled the two events with grace and dignity.
- Fire Captain Ray Martinez served as family liaison to the MacKenzie family and Fire Apparatus Engineer/Paramedic Scott Davis served as the family liaison to the Douglas family. They directly supported the families from the very beginning of these tragic incidents.
- Amador El Dorado Unit Communications Operator Jamie Duarte traveled to Arizona and volunteered her time during the Granite Mountain Hotshot memorial service by working in the Yarnell Dispatch Center as an initial attack dispatcher, allowing dispatch personnel to attend the memorial. The dispatcher she relieved had not had a day off since the burnover occurred.
- The Department's Employee Support Services staff worked tirelessly to provide critical support to both the families and Unit, while still meeting the needs of other staff throughout the Department.
- Finally, throughout each of these losses, our Honor Guard represented the Department and the fire service at the highest level. Their role was not simply performing at the services. They worked tirelessly every hour of the day ensuring these heroes received the dignity they deserved, and that the families had the opportunity to honor their loved ones.

Although we will always grieve our losses, and keep their families in our thoughts and prayers, we must focus on healing and be ready for the next emergency call. As demonstrated by the fire activity this last week, this continues to be a challenging fire season and our first priority must be on the job at hand.

I have never been more proud of all of you and of our Department.

Chief Ken Pimlott
CAL FIRE Director