

Carriers struggle in aftermath of fire

The deadliest fire in California history has a death toll that is staggering. As of press time for this issue of *The Postal Record*, the Camp Fire that overran the city of Paradise, CA late last year, killed 85 people, with an additional 11 still unaccounted for. Thousands more have been left homeless.

No letter carriers are among the dead, but at least 24 active and four retired letter carriers have lost their homes, said **Brian Bump**, president of Sacramento, CA Branch 133, which includes carriers in Paradise and Chico, CA, the cities most affected by the fire. At press time, four more carriers have yet to gain access to the burned area to see whether their homes survived.

The Camp Fire erupted in the mountains west of Paradise and Chico on Nov. 8. It took nearly three weeks of firefighting and another weekend of heavy rain to extinguish the blaze. The fire burned 153,336 acres of forest and grasslands, and it destroyed 13,972 homes, 528 commercial buildings and 4,293 other structures. Nearly all of Paradise was destroyed.

Until the Camp Fire surpassed the grisly record, last year's Tubbs Fire, which damaged or destroyed the homes of at least three city letter carriers, was the most destructive and deadly blaze in the state's history.

Letter carriers in the affected area resumed delivering the mail as soon as it was safe and they could access their routes, though air quality remained a problem for many until the fire was extinguished. For several days, letter carriers in a larger area surrounding the fire wore masks provided by the Postal Service.

Several postal facilities were damaged or unusable. Miraculously, the Paradise Post Office was left mostly



intact, but it was located in an evacuation area and could not be immediately accessed. Eleven city routes at the Paradise facility were shifted to the Chico Midtown Station.

"They're making do, that's the best I can put it," Bump said of the carriers displaced from Paradise and a few other stations working from Chico. "They put a smile on their faces, but they've got a lot on their minds." Among them are carriers who lost their homes in the fire.

Some homeless carriers have gone to other areas to live with relatives, Bump said, and for now, USPS is allowing them to work in those areas. "The Postal Service has been pretty accommodating," he said.

Displaced carriers delivering from the Chico Midtown Station were expected to work there at least through the holiday season, Bump said. Given the scale of devastation, though, some may not have routes to return to because they were wiped out by the fire, he added. The Postal Service could adjust routes or find work elsewhere for those displaced carriers.



NALC Disaster Relief Foundation

Make a donation by sending a check or money order to NALC Disaster Relief Foundation, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144.

The NALC Disaster Relief Foundation furnished uniforms for carriers who lost them in the fire and is sharing information with these carriers about additional resources. Branches or members wishing to donate funds to the Disaster Relief Foundation may do so now by sending a check or money order to NALC Disaster Relief Foundation, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144. Donations are not currently tax deductible, but the foundation is applying for tax-exempt status. One hundred percent of donations received from letter carriers, branches and state associations go to letter carriers in need—no administrative costs are deducted. **PR**