

Repetition: Good, bad, and (sometimes) ugly!

BY SANDY SHAFFER

As you can see from this photo, our puppy, Maggie, is definitely growing! At seven months she's very intelligent, but also stubborn and bossy. Fortunately, her big heart makes up for those last two traits! So does puppy school. Hubby and I quickly realized that repetition is the key to success, and that the lessons work *especially* well if you're both using the same training words.

Talk about repetition—all of those endless days of smoke this summer! Maggie put up with it as she learned to walk on a "loose leash" around our forested property.

Fortunately, our local areas dodged any big fires, but it seemed like every day or two there was another record-setting catastrophic wildfire somewhere in the West. The local news reporters were repeating similar messages to us each evening for weeks. It may have sounded like "old hat" after a while for some people, but not to me—I was reading the official reports and stats. And they were scary.

Wind seemed to be the leading factor this year, with many fires showing initial runs of 20,000 to 80,000 acres.

Drought-dry fuels helped build intensity, so that almost anything in the fire's path burned, including telephone lines. Which meant that people may not have received a "reverse-911" call to evacuate. Homes burned by the hundreds rather than the dozens, and, with little notice to evacuate, people died. In Washington State one fire overran a US Forest Service-Washington Department of Natural Resources crew, killing three and seriously burning four others.

And then, on September 12 there was the third fire of the summer in California's Napa-Clear Lake area—the Valley Fire. Repetitive? Not at all; it set even more records! The initial wind-driven run through a small town caught everyone by surprise, giving folks little time to evacuate. After burning just over 76,000 acres, four senior residents were dead, four firefighters injured, and a total of 1,958 structures destroyed. Repetition all right, with a rate-of-spread of *one acre burned per second!* Can you even imagine this?

In early October I attended our local Cohesive Wildfire Strategy meeting to hear what our agency reps had



As Maggie grows, she still has control of her leash—and the author.

experienced or had heard about the fires. Several of the attendees had been on fire crews for those wildfires, and they shared experiences: the record-level fire behavior and devastation that they saw, as well as the sheer numbers of big fires happening at the same time! Resources—crews, engines, equipment—were all taken! As one fire manager said, "We got our butts kicked this year."

Could something like this happen in the Applegate, I wondered? Should I harp on doing maintenance work around the home in this *Applegater* article? I hate to repeat the same message if it's not relevant. But the fire folks were saying that the conditions of *our* western forests and wildlands are too extreme, and that those conditions *would not* be changing over a single wet winter. Repeated budget cuts for forest management just

exacerbate the situation.

These experts, whom I've known for well over a decade, said we can't treat wildfire issues the same anymore; we need a paradigm shift, a new approach by *all* landowners and managers to address this problem. That means me and you—all of us working *together* with local, county, state and federal partners to better prepare our lands to survive a wildfire.

So, because wildfires this summer *did* show that defensible space works, and because we *do* have an influx of four to five percent new residents annually, and because vegetation *does* grow, and because we are *all getting older* and might need help to get our work done—I am repeating my message of needing to maintain our defensible space and our access routes, to clean our home ignition zones, and to practice our family evacuation plans!

Our president recently commented that mass shootings are becoming routine, that we've become numb to them. Let's not get that way about wildfires. We *can* affect our survivability, so get to work! I am.

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For information or to schedule home assessments, call either Applegate Fire District at 541-899-1050 or the Oregon Department of Forestry at 541-664-3328.

Volunteer firefighter recruiting and retention

BY CHRIS WOLFARD

I am often asked how we are doing for volunteer firefighters. My usual quick response is "Oh, we could use a little more help," but there are a lot of variables to consider when answering this question. We have seven fire stations. Some are doing well... some not so well.

Station 6 on Kubli Road, for example, has six assigned volunteers mostly available day and night and another volunteer, who works right down the road, available throughout the day. This is the best roster Station 6 has had in its 17-year history. Station 5 at the top of Jacksonville Hill, on the other hand, is at its lowest number of volunteers ever: three, and all three work full-time jobs (one as a full-time firefighter in Klamath Falls). Consequently, Station 5 is having great difficulty responding to calls in its area. Its calls are usually covered by our Headquarters Station in Ruch with assistance from the City of Jacksonville Fire Department.

The two stations with the greatest need right now are Stations 1 (North Applegate Road) and 4 (Water Gap Road). These two are a high priority for us for several reasons: (1) Most volunteers that are assigned to these stations have full-time jobs that preclude

them from responding to emergencies during daylight hours. This also puts a tremendous load on those who are available to respond. (2) These stations are strategically located at intersections of busy roads and relatively densely populated areas within our district. (3) We recently had a couple of volunteers retire after 24 and 34 years of service.

I ask you, the reader of this Applegater, to consider either volunteering yourself or talking to someone you know about volunteering. You may not be cut out for firefighting, but you probably have a family member, friend or neighbor who is.

One of the first and most common questions about becoming a volunteer firefighter is "How much training is involved?" We would like to say it's short and easy. However, the reality is that you will need to put in quite a few hours and it is challenging. We conduct our firefighter academy beginning mid-January and concluding mid-March. The academy consists of reading, some lectures, videos and a lot of hands-on training. Subject areas range from fire streams and fire-suppression techniques to fire department history and fire prevention. Most students are impressed

with the high-level teaching ability of our fire instructors and always look forward to the hands-on training.

A g a i n , please consider volunteering with us. We are certain you will learn new skills and make new friends. If that isn't enough in itself, don't forget that as a firefighter you will be putting yourself in a position to help your neighbors and friends. You may even find yourself in a position to save the life of one of your own family members. Undoubtedly you



Firefighters demonstrate extrication techniques with the Jaws of Life. Photo: Chris Wolfard.

will find becoming a volunteer firefighter very rewarding.

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