

# What are those things, anyway?

BY SANDY SHAFFER

Have you ever passed by our Applegate Valley Fire District's headquarters on Upper Applegate Road in Ruch? Or attended a meeting or a social event there in the fire district's training center building? And while you were parking, did you wonder what all those large steel storage containers out back were for? I personally have wondered, especially since they seemed to be multiplying in number! So I took pictures of said containers and then asked our fire chief and operations chiefs some questions. (The operations chief's job description includes planning, reviewing, analyzing, and upgrading the duties *and training* of firefighters.)

Their answers to my questions were very interesting and somewhat creative: Those containers will be used to simulate burning homes.

Basic science: Because these old storage units are made of steel, they will not burn. So, the fire district's conceptual use for them is to configure the containers to simulate a room in a home or business that is burning. Some of the containers on-site are currently having windows and doors installed by one of the district's residents who is a fabricator by trade, so as to better mimic a home.

Also, some containers have been placed on top of another, to simulate a two-story house! Three sets of used staircases have

been ordered by the fire district, and, later this spring, one set will be installed internally to complete the two-story-house scenario. The other stair sets will be installed on the exterior of that container, one providing access from the ground to the second floor and the other from the second floor to the roof. With the focus *always* on safety, district personnel will also install permanent emergency escape ladders.

The plan is to train firefighters how to safely enter the burning unit, how to fight the fire while communicating with their on-site team, how to deal with potentially hazardous items inside the building, and, last but not least, how to rescue occupants or move them to safety. I learned that OSHA (Occupational Safety Health Agency) requires that a minimum of two people go inside a burning building (three are required if the fire is *actively* growing) and that at least two more firefighters have to be outside that building, ready to spring into action.

Our fire district's rural location, long narrow roads, seasonal weather issues, and the valley-wide senior constituency *all* present challenges to the Applegate Valley Fire District. Providing 24/7 response requires that volunteers trained in medical emergencies, structure and wildland fires, and hazardous materials spills be located all



Storage containers serve as mock homes and businesses for firefighter training. Photo: Sandy Shaffer.

across our valley. If they cannot be the first responder on a call, at least these volunteers could be quick back-up coverage.

The firefighters stationed at headquarters in Ruch (the most populated neighborhood in the valley) are the designated first responders, but something like a full-blown lightning storm rolling across the valley during fire season would bring *all* of our volunteers to duty.

Back to the topic. With this rural challenge, our fire district leaders decided to address one of the issues: how to train our volunteer firefighters at headquarters in the Applegate, so as to keep them close to home all year round. Hence the training center at headquarters in Ruch. (An aside: This decision ultimately also addressed the huge need for Applegate organizations and residents to have a community meeting space!)

I've been involved with our fire district in various positions for over a decade now. I've served on the board of directors with two fire chiefs. I feel that this new in-house training program is a smart move by our fire chiefs (and staff)—to keep firefighter bodies in our valley while gaining top-notch, consistent job training.

Very few small fire districts in our state (let alone in southwest Oregon) have the ability to provide the type of operational training on-site that our fire district has developed. Other local or nearby districts often send their new recruits to our "academy" for classes. Our fire district is providing a valuable service, and that training center building is the key.

So, as Paul Harvey used to say, "And now you know the rest of the story."

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# Spring is in full swing at Pacifica Garden

BY CHRISTINE LAZINA

As buds multiply on the trees, and shoots of spring flora emerge from the earth all around our lovely property, Pacifica staff is gearing up for a busy spring season providing educational programming to students in the community and from around the state.

## Getting up close with science in the Caterpillar

Pacifica's signature mobile science lab, the Caterpillar, will soon be off to schools to provide hands-on learning about

what makes up our earth. Our current curriculum covers rocks, fossils, and plate tectonics. Students will get the chance to create their own rock collection, model mountain-building events, create layers-of-the-earth art projects, and dig for fossil replicas (and view some real ones!).

Pacifica's Caterpillar will also be returning to the 65th Pear Blossom Festival at Pear Blossom Park in downtown Medford on April 10 and 11. Stop in for kid-friendly activities and the chance

Fifth and sixth graders enjoy a field trip to Pacifica.



to view our wide collection of fossils, rocks, crystals, and petrified wood. The Caterpillar is also available for booking at other community functions; please email [education@pacificagarden.org](mailto:education@pacificagarden.org) if you would like to bring hands-on science and nature exploration to kids at your event.

## Pacifica Outdoor School (PODS) in its third year

Pacifica is also excited to welcome hundreds of fifth- and sixth-grade students to the beautiful Applegate Valley for another season of PODS sessions! We have had great success in the past two years growing our outdoor school program, including new fall sessions in 2019.

Highlights this spring include the first attendance of students from a school from well outside the Rogue Valley area, and the first time we have a school returning for a second outdoor school session in the same year.

Harbor Lights Middle School students will be traveling all the way from Bandon, Oregon, to experience place-based learning in an entirely different environment than that of their own home. We look forward to exploring new species, habitats, and ecosystems with our coastal visitors in our beautiful valley.

We are also excited to pilot a two-part outdoor school experience with students

from Rogue River Elementary, who attended PODS last fall. This spring these students will return to learn holistically about a single ecosystem in different seasons and life stages, building upon their previous knowledge and connecting it to new concepts. Pacifica's instructors can't wait to get outside and experience the wonders of spring right alongside all of our students!

## Enjoy Pacifica's grounds this spring

Between our Caterpillar program, field trips, and outdoor school, Pacifica reaches approximately 3,000 children each year with the chance to experience learning in, and about, nature. Since many of these programs take place on Pacifica's property, we would like to remind visitors to please check our website at [pacificagarden.org](http://pacificagarden.org) to confirm which days we are open to the public. On days we are not hosting schools or events, Pacifica is always happy to share our trails, waterways, and recreation opportunities with you and your family. Property closures are for the safety of our students, and we appreciate your understanding and cooperation in supporting youth educational programming!

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Pacifica grounds are open to the public. Go to [pacificagarden.org](http://pacificagarden.org) for details.





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