

Valley Air District opens annual calendar contest

By Merced Sun-Star Staff

In the Fresno Bee, Thursday, Sept. 11, 2014

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is seeking entries for its annual Healthy Air Living Kids' Calendar art contest, officials announced Wednesday.

The bilingual wall calendar is produced with the help of students in San Joaquin Valley schools who illustrate ways residents can help keep the air clean. Each drawing is accompanied by a clean-air message. Twenty-thousand copies are printed and distributed free of charge to schools, community groups, healthcare facilities, churches and nonprofit organizations throughout the Valley. The contest is open to students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

According to contest guidelines, 14 pieces of art will be selected, one for each month of 2015, a cover art piece and one for January 2016. Paper should be placed sideways in landscape orientation, so that it is 8 1/2 inches high and 11 inches wide. Officials ask that the artwork be in vivid colors. The medium can be paint, pen, crayon, marker, pencil or computer-generated art.

The artwork should also contain a message about how to live a healthy air life. Message examples from the 2014 calendar include: "Do your share, let's clean the air" and "Don't use your car if you don't live too far. Walk, bike or run." Bilingual and Spanish-language messages are also encouraged.

Artists must include their name and address, phone number, email, age, grade and school on the back of the entry. The deadline for entries is Oct. 6.

The art should be mailed flat, not folded, to: 2015 Kids Calendar, Valley Air District, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno, CA 93726, or submit the art to the nearest district office. Contest entry forms can be downloaded at the district's website, www.valleyair.org.

Hundreds flee 2 California wildfires; homes burn

Associated Press

The Hanford Sentinel and Porterville Recorder, Monday, September 15, 2014

POLLOCK PINES, Calif. (AP) — Two raging wildfires in California forced hundreds of people to evacuate their homes, including one near a lakeside resort town that burned nearly two dozen structures, many of them homes.

The blaze, sparked Sunday afternoon near a foothill community south of the entrance to Yosemite National Park in central California, prompted authorities to evacuate about 1,000 residents out of about 400 homes, Madera County Sheriff's spokeswoman Erica Stuart said.

The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection said flames damaged or destroyed 21 structures. The Fresno Bee reports one neighborhood was hit especially hard, with several homes turned to ash and smoldering embers.

"This is gut-wrenching," CalFire Battalion Chief Chris Christopherson told the newspaper. "It makes you sick."

Flames were already bearing down as some people fled.

"My wife and I looked back and saw our backyard was burning," 72-year-old Joe Cunningham told the Bee. "So we didn't take much time. She drove one car, I drove the other car, and we just left."

It wasn't immediately clear exactly how many of the burned structures were homes.

The fire started off a road outside of Oakhurst, near Yosemite National Park, and made a run to Bass Lake. Stoked by winds, it quickly charred at least 320 acres, CalFire spokesman Daniel Berlant said.

The lakeside area is a popular destination throughout the year. There were no reports of the blaze, which is 20 percent contained, affecting the park.

The destructive fire led Gov. Jerry Brown to secure a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to cover 75 percent of the cost of fighting the fire, state officials said.

Further north, a wildfire about 60 miles east of Sacramento forced the evacuation of 133 homes. El Dorado County sheriff's officials said residents of an additional 406 homes were being told to prepare to flee.

Berlant said the blaze started in a remote area Saturday but exploded on Sunday when it reached a canyon full of thick, dry brush. It grew by about 900 acres overnight to 3,900 acres, or a little more than 6 square miles. It was 10 percent contained.

Meanwhile in Southern California, evacuation orders for 200 homes in Orange County's Silverado Canyon were lifted late Sunday as firefighters contained 50 percent of a wildfire.

The residents were evacuated after the fire broke out Friday. The U.S. Forest Service downgraded the fire's size from 2 ½ square miles to 1 ½ square miles due to better mapping of the blaze.

Six firefighters have suffered minor injuries, many of them from heat exhaustion as the region baked under triple-digit temperatures.

A heat wave was expected to last through Tuesday in Southern California, and a smoke advisory was in effect for parts of Riverside and Orange counties.

21 structures destroyed or damaged by fast moving Courtney Fire

By Brian Wilkinson

Sierra Star, Sunday, September 14, 2014

Winds quickly spread a fire that broke out at about 1:40 p.m. Sunday afternoon near Courtney Lane off Crane Valley Road (426). The fire burned up the valley to the north and jumped Road 426, to Bass Lake Heights, destroying or damaging 21 structures. At the height of the fire, 400 homes were threatened.

According to Cal Fire, about 320 acres have been burned, 400 firefighting personnel, 30 fire engines, and 14 bulldozers are on the incident in addition to helicopters and planes, and hundreds of people have been forced to evacuate the area. The fire was 20% contained at 9 p.m..

Madera County Sheriff's Department deputies have evacuated residents in the path of the fire (including Ridgeline and Slide Creek Estates) to Red Cross emergency shelters at the Oakhurst Community Center and North Fork Elementary School, under the direction of Katina Poitras. More than 30 people were at Oakhurst Community Center awaiting word when they can return to their homes.

Kathy Woodward and Jeanne Andrews, both visibly shaken, were at the community center after being evacuated, not knowing if their homes were destroyed or not.

"When I was driving away all I could see was black smoke," Andrews said. "All I had time to grab was some cloths, medicine, and my (golden retriever) dog Buffy.

Woodward lives alone on Chapparal Drive off Balsam. She was in town shopping at the time she got a phone message about the fire from a friend and could not get back to her house before the Road 426 was closed.

"I don't care about the house, I just wanted to get my three dogs out, but they wouldn't let me in to get them," Woodward said.

The Central California Disaster Animal Team was at the community center and were taking care of four dogs, four cats, and two birds. Large animals were taken to the Bohna Ranch in Coarsegold.

Those evacuated to the community center were fed at 7:30 p.m. by Sierra Pines Church who had left over food from a church function. A member of the church, Justin Barigian, is a chef, and he provided pasta with Italian sausage, green salad, bread and deserts for about 30 people.

Road 426, between Courtney Lane and Road 223 is closes, as is Road 222 between Road 432 (Rec Point) and Road 426, and Road 426 between 222 and 223.

The cause of the fire is under investigation.

Details: information line, (209) 966-4784, www.fire.ca.gov.

Yosemite's Meadow fire estimated cost at \$3.9 million to date

By Andrea Castillo

The Fresno Bee, Sunday, September 14, 2014

Yosemite National Park officials estimate that the effort to put out a 4,760-acre blaze has cost \$3.9 million to date.

The Meadow fire remains at 50% contained and has drawn help from 536 firefighters. Officials hope to have the fire fully extinguished by Sept. 21. More accurate mapping allowed fire crews to drop the acreage figure to 4,760 from 4,960 acres listed in Saturday's fire update, officials said Sunday.

Firefighters are using minimally invasive suppression tactics, trying to steer the fire into granite rock faces and cliffs.

"That is strongly based on what the weather does," said Bill Sonka, a fire information officer for the National Park Service. "If we get high winds, it could change all that."

Sonka, reached Sunday morning, said the day is expected to be hot and windy, but smoke levels are way down from Saturday. He said temperatures are expected to decrease through next Friday, which could be good for the fire containment effort.

Officials think the high-elevation wilderness fire started as a spot fire from the Meadow fire, which ignited via a lightning strike in mid-July. Around 185 hikers were evacuated by helicopter on Sept. 7, including 85 from the Half Dome summit and 100 from trails and campgrounds in Little Yosemite Valley, where the fire had spread to both sides of the Merced River between Half Dome and Mt. Starr King.

The cable ladder to the top of Half Dome reopened Saturday morning, but several trails and campsites near the fire remain closed, including:

Little Yosemite Valley (closed to overnight use)

The John Muir Trail between Little Yosemite Valley and Sunrise High Sierra Camp

Sunrise and Merced Lake High Sierra Camps and backpackers' camps

The Sunrise Trail south of the Tenaya Lake Trail Junction

Clouds Rest and Sunrise Lakes

Council picks Barwick, Vejvoda for air board meeting

By Luis Hernandez

Visalia Times-Delta, Friday, September 12, 2014

Council members Skip Barwick and Craig Vejvoda were selected earlier this month as Tulare representatives for the Special City Selection Committee for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution meeting Sept. 30.

Barwick was designated as the voting member, while Vejvoda was picked as the alternate.

There are 58 Valley cities that are part of the pollution board. Vejvoda said 30 representatives are needed to meet quorum and vote on items presented at the meeting.

The committee is responsible for making appointments of city representatives to the pollution control board governing board. There are five city spots, Vejvoda said.

Attending the meeting, given quorum is met, will provide for having opportunity help select who's selected to the positions.

"It is very important that whomever we name makes that meeting," Vejvoda said. "I plan to be there."

So, did Barwick, he said.

Online: www.valleyair.org.

Adney selected as Tulare police Officer of the Year

Officer Jacob Adney was selected at the Tulare Police Department's Officer of the Year.

Adney, who's assigned to the investigation's unit, was hired on Dec. 2010.

Record Specialist Angel Yoder, who works for the department's administration division, was selected as Employee of the year. Yoder began working for Tulare police on Oct. 2004.

Tulare Police Chief Jerry Breckinridge made the announcements earlier this week during the department's Chief's Inspection detail.

Making the employees' announcement is an addition to the Chief's Inspection detail, held the same day the fair kicks off. Tulare police officers provide safety presence along the fair's parade route. All officers take part in the detail and it was the natural time for making the announcement, Breckinridge said previously.

City council meets Tuesday

The Tulare City Council will meet in regular session at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Council Chamber, 491 N. M St.

Agenda items include:

- Consider awarding a \$57,000 contract to Visalia-based Todd Companies for the retrofit of sidewalk, drive approach and ramped curb return improvements on Brentwood Street between Cross and Sandalwood avenues.
- Consider and accept a \$53,000 grant for construction of in-roadway crosswalk lighting at the Santa Fe Trail crossing of Laspina Street.
- Consider and award a \$68,900 contract to Fresno-based Hobbs Constructio, Inc. for building in-pavement crosswalk lighting for the Santa Trail crossing of Laspina Street, seeking to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety.
- Consider adopting the 2035 General Plan update.

Before meeting in regular session, council will meet at 6 p.m. for a study session about the Ewers Bench Marking Study, which focuses on the wastewater division.

After meeting in regular session, council will meet in closed session to be part of lease negotiations for property belonging to Volley Properties LLC.

Online: www.ci.tulare.ca.us.

BPU's meeting canceled

The Tulare Board of Public Utilities won't meet next week.

The board was to meet at 3 p.m. Thursday at the Council Chamber, 491 N. M St. City administrators said the meeting was cancelled because of lack of business.

The board is scheduled to next meet on Oct. 2.

A five-member body, the board of public utilities is responsible for regulating and managing the city's utilities divisions, which include solid waste, water, sewer, and wastewater.