

Lawyers Raise Funds For Fire Department

COMMUNITY: Carmel Valley lawyers reach out to Volunteer Fire Department.

A holiday fundraiser organized by lawyers from the SDCBA's new Carmel Valley Section raised \$4,230 for the Shelter Valley Volunteer Fire Department, a non-funded department that responds along rural corridors in eastern San Diego County. The fundraiser was held Dec. 11 at the Carmel Valley office of Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP, where approximately 50 attorneys and guests, including the Shelter Valley fire chief, gathered for a reception and check presentation.

"It was a highly successful and well attended event," said Paul A. Hilding, chair of the Bar's Carmel Valley Section. "We were very pleased that we could help out for such a good cause."

"We had a good turnout for our first annual holiday party for the Carmel Valley Section," agreed

Bob Gerber, a partner at Sheppard Mullin and chair of the firm's pro bono committee. "We made our offices available for the party so that we could donate 100-percent of the proceeds. All of the money that people donated went directly to the Shelter Valley Volunteer Fire Department."

At the reception, representatives from the Shelter Valley Volunteer Fire Department expressed their gratitude to all donors, and particularly to Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP for hosting the event and providing the catering; and to Morrison Foerster LLP, which collected \$2,000 from attorneys in their firm's San Francisco and New York offices.

With 15 to 20 volunteers, the Shelter Valley Volunteer Fire Department is located in the high desert area, just a few miles east of Julian. The department provides emergency response along rural corridors comprising some 60 miles of state and county highways. Like other non-funded departments, it is responsible for fire suppression, medical aid and

vehicle rescue services in its jurisdiction.

Shelter Valley responded 73 times in 2001, and answered many mutual aid calls as well. In 2002, the number of responses increased to nearly 100 calls, including the Pines fire. "During the Pines fire, we had four trucks out of commission," said Gerald Sanders, Shelter Valley's 72-year-old volunteer fire chief. The department currently has three fire engines and a Chevrolet Suburban for medical rescue, according to Sanders.

In October's devastating Cedar fire, Shelter Valley sent volunteer crews and all of the equipment it could muster to fight for over 100 hours alongside the well-equipped, paid fire fighters of San Diego and other counties. After the fire, the department had depleted most of its funds for essential equipment maintenance, including pump servicing and certification, breathing apparatus and extrication equipment services, servicing and maintenance of diesel engines, brake testing and even the purchase of new tires. Since they raise their

own operating money, the department must also replenish funding for necessary fuel, liability insurance, workers compensation insurance, station upkeep and protective clothing.

The operating money for the department comes mainly from donations and activities such as selling hot dogs and hamburgers at Sunday barbecues, and holding auctions, pancake breakfasts and rummage sales. After the Cedar fire, it became apparent that it was going to take more than usual to get them out of the red.

The concept for the fundraiser originated during a volunteer training session of the Bar's Disaster Legal Services Coalition, organized to render free legal services to disaster victims in the aftermath of the October fires. SDCBA member Susan Sanders, the daughter of Shelter Valley's volunteer fire chief, presented the situation to the Bar's executive director, Sheree Swetin, at the training session.

Meanwhile, the Bar's new Carmel Valley Section was look-

ing for a charitable project to benefit from its first social gathering. "It was a perfect match between the two entities," Swetin said.

In November, Susan Sanders sent a letter of appeal to the Bar explaining the SVVFD's plight in recovering from the destruction of the fire. "We thought it was a very well-written letter and a worthy cause, so that is how we decided to make them the object of our event," Hilding said. "It gave the legal community and the Carmel Valley Section the opportunity to help out, and we were honored to do so."

Chief Sanders said the contribution is an enormous abatement to his department. "It will definitely pay all of our expenses from the fire," he said. "It will also let us do some things we have not been able to do, mainly work on the trucks."

The Bar's contribution "helped speed up the department's recovery from the costly business of the Cedar fire, and now the volunteer firefighters can look for-

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ward to catching up on some long delayed critical work on their vehicles," Sanders wrote in an e-mail communication to the SDCBA in December.

With the help of a grant from the federal government and the S.A.F.E. Organization, the department recently purchased a new small brush engine, No. 298, used for highway rescue and brush fires, he added.

Lawyers from Sheppard, Mullin, Richter & Hampton LLP have provided legal services for numerous families impacted by the Cedar fire. "Our lawyers have also volunteered quite a bit to help fire disaster victims with legal needs at the on-site Disaster Recovery Centers," said Gerber, who is currently representing clients who lost their home by helping them review insurance policies.

The Carmel Valley Section of the SDCBA focuses on the interests and practice areas of attorneys in this expanding technology corridor located east of I-5 and just north of Sorrento Valley. For more information call chair Paul A. Hilding, (858) 259-6477.

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