

## The Boles Fire: A Recap

### **September 15, 2014**

It was not an unusual morning in the windy though otherwise peaceful town of Weed California. By day's end, however, what has been described as a perfect storm whipped out of control an unattended campfire and left in its wake a swath of charred homes and community gathering places.

Weed is a small community with a population of just under 3,000 in a rural county in far northern California with a population just under 45,000. Named for Abner Weed, the town grew up around a lumber mill he located there in the early 20th century--ironically for its high winds which he speculated would quickly dry out the log decks for transport and sale.

At 1:35 p.m, with winds gusting to 40 miles an hour, the campfire-turned-raging-wildfire quickly spread across adjacent hillsides heading for the elementary school, high school, and residential neighborhoods surrounding them. Evacuation took place within minutes.

Twenty minutes later, due to clear-headed action by the town's fire chief (whose own home was lost in the fire while he fought to save others), large bombers equipped with fire retardant were pulled off a nearby fire in uninhabited forest lands and redirected for Weed to attack the fire and stop its progress.

Fire retardant pink was the color of the day in Weed, and miraculously, no lives were lost. In two and a half hours from the time the fire began, 143 homes were destroyed-- as well as the Catholic and Presbyterian Churches, the new state-of-the-art community center, the library, a portion of the Roseburg Lumber Mill, part of the elementary school and Great Northern Services, a nonprofit organization working to invigorate local communities.

Immediately, truckloads of clothing and food began arriving from within a 200-mile radius and many volunteers from Weed and surrounding communities began sorting and distributing it to fire survivors. Many walked into these distribution centers with nothing but what they were wearing at the time of their evacuation. All had burned.

Rotary clubs from across the nation began to read and hear about the loss of homes and businesses and began sending financial assistance. The Weed Rotary Club established a 501(c) (3) Boles Fire Relief Fund immediately and set up a special committee of 6 to review requests and needs from individuals and families and distribute funds. The club has funded a refrigerated van for the distribution of food commodities, a class to train carpenters for the rebuilding process, furniture, and many other requests that have come in.

Those who lost their homes have been supported by a number of local and state agencies. Trained caseworkers have taken families step-by-step through many processes. With a median household income of \$25,659, some of the families had full insurance, some were under-insured and others had no insurance. In a community whose unemployment rate is 19.5 percent with a poverty rate of 23.9 percent, even the fully-insured have struggled.

Progress is being made, however. As of this writing, 45 homes are completed or under construction. Weed--with its frontier-minded residents--is indeed rising from the ashes.

Written August 7, 2015