

Illinois Valley News

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Happy Camp Complex update

24,934 acres total for the complex.

Committed Resources: 64 crews, 8 helicopters, 99 engines, 16 dozers and 23 water tenders.

The Frying Pan Fire, in Zone 1, grew about 1,600 acres Monday and as of Tuesday morning is now 22,410 acres. The fire was most active on the north and northeast sides near China Creek and Wolf Creek, just west of Grider Ridge. Clear skies allowed aircraft (including DC-10, BAe-146, and MD87) and helicopters a full day of flying, applying water and fire retardant on the fire's edge. Helicopters conducted more tactical ignition operations on the south side of the fire. The results were a continuous, low-intensity burn downslope toward Doolittle Creek, which should limit the fire's progression southward as it runs into the treated area. The fire on the southwest side continues to burn down to Elk Creek in many places, where it then stops. It has not spotted across Elk Creek. The tactical ignition operation that crews started yesterday and worked on through the night was successful and held at the east-west dozer line just north of Wolf Creek and China Creek.

See Happy on A-10



(Photo by Dale Sandberg, IVFD Media Dept)

Driver killed in Deer Creek wreck

By Dan Mancuso
IVN Staff

Illinois Valley resident Lex Alan Johnson, 26, was killed in an Sunday, Aug. 24, single-vehicle collision.

According to an Oregon State Police report, Johnson was driving a 1999 Ford F-250. The OSP believes Johnson lost control of the vehicle and flipped after leaving the road in the 6000 block of Deer Creek Road at about 3 a.m. Sunday.

Johnson was found underneath the pickup and pronounced deceased at the scene. The state patrol said he had not been using safety restraints.

The OSP report also states that four other occupants were in the vehicle with Johnson. Lucas Harris, 21, was riding in the pickup's bed and was

also ejected. Harris was transported by a private party to Three Rivers Community Hospital in Grants Pass with non-life threatening injuries. Three other occupants in the pickup were reportedly not injured. Their names were not released.

Johnson was a well know personality in the Valley and his loss has shaken up many residents. One of the them is Delane Young

"He was always talking about his family," Young said. "His sister was just here for a visit and he was excited to have spent time with her and her kids."

Geoff Parker, a lifelong friend of Johnson's had just been in town the weekend prior. Parker explained in an email to the *Illinois Valley News* how fortunate he was to spend the day with his old friend.

"Lex touched everyone's life in such a positive

way and I think we can all learn something from that," Parker wrote. "I never have seen the guy mad. He was very gracious, outgoing and treated everyone like family. I think we could all learn a lot from him. He lived his life in a very positive way and I don't think he had any regrets.

"I will miss him forever, but every time I think of him, I laugh, because positive memories are the ones we should focus on," Parker added. "He has an amazing family and a huge group of friends that will forever miss him, but we will always be thankful that we got to be a part of his life and share in the memories."

The OSP was assisted at the scene by the Illinois Valley Fire District.

There is a Celebration of Life on Saturday, August 30 at Rough and Ready Park at 1 p.m.

IV Eagles program helps veterans rebuild their lives

By
Annette McGee Rasch
IVN Senior Contributing Writer



The IV Eagle

The IV Eagles is the local arm of the U.S. Veteran Administration's rural outreach program that provides transportation to medical appointments and helps veterans plug into a network of services offered at the Southern Oregon Rehabilitation Center and Clinics (SORCC) in White City, Oregon.

While most rural communities have just one van for veterans, the IV Eagles acquired a second one to accommodate the growing number of veterans participating in the unique program developed three years ago by longtime Illinois Valley resident De Spellman. There are 115 registered veterans who participate, with 60 to 70 of them using the service each month.

"The success of the IV Eagles and the number of miles put on our first van warranted the second van, though we really need more volunteer drivers right now," Spellman said.

In addition to seeing doctors, many Valley vets participate in a talking circle, sweat lodges and even receive drumming lessons at SORCC. With full support from the VA, an inter-tribal group of advocates initiated programs based on Native American traditions and opened them up to all veterans. Located on traditional Shasta tribal lands, SORCC offers the only sweat lodge in America on VA hospital grounds.

"Spirituality is where it starts and then the body heals better," Spellman said.

SORCC's outreach is what makes the IV Eagles program fly, and Spellman complimented the VA for sanctioning veterans' involvement in these innovative activities.

"The VA pays for everything and provides awesome support," Spellman said. "For a place

like the Illinois Valley, that really matters. And participating in this program isn't about being disabled, it's about being around other veterans who care. That camaraderie and understanding is important, so we aim to help vets get past the idea that this program is some kind of hand-out. It's a benefit they've earned."

Bruce LeMay served in the U.S. Navy and ran "brownwater" river patrol operations during the Vietnam war. Like millions of veterans, LeMay copes with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

"When my son died in the 2008 Grayback Iron 44 helicopter crash, I needed to connect with a group of vets to unload and process my loss," LeMay said. "I went to the vets center in Grants Pass, but they didn't provide veteran's groups, just one-on-one counseling and that wasn't what I needed."

That tragedy, the deadliest helicopter crash involving working firefighters in U.S. history, took nine lives and severely injured four others.

"Then my wife gave me a newspaper clipping about the IV Eagles and the access to the talking circle in White City," LeMay said. "This program allowed me to receive help in a way that works for me. The talking circle is a forum of self expression to a receptive ear, people that know what you're talking about. War, and the hurt we received from our participation in it, results in a common bond."

"Without the IV Eagles I couldn't afford the gas to get to White City six times a month," LeMay added. "I really thank all the caring volunteers in this program."

Marine Corp veteran Donald Lee was deployed in Operation Iraqi Freedom. He served in the infantry and endured both a broken back and a brain injury.

"First they got me addicted to pain meds and then they withheld them," Lee said. "But I documented what happened to me and worked with patient advocates in St. Louis to help change some protocols to benefit other veterans dealing with the same issues."

Lee says when he left the service he received only five days of "transitional support" that was mostly geared toward gaining employment, but that services like talking circles and spiritual support are "what our returning warriors really need and programs like this should be available nationwide."

See Vets on A-10

IV Airport helping our neighbors

By
Judy Hoyle
IVN Contributing Writer

The US Forest Service (USFS) contacted Josephine County Airports Manager Larry Graves on Tuesday, Aug. 12, to arrange setting up a Class-I Helitack Base at the Illinois Valley Airport. Graves agreed immediately and advance-team members arrived the following evening. By Wednesday night, the heavy helicopters were coming in as well.

Firefighting crews with names like Heap's Peak Helitack, Big Hill Helitack and the Chester Fly Club relocated to the airport in order to be closer to the latest lightning-caused fires in Northern California, now referred to as the Happy Camp Fire Complex; and also the Illinois Valley and Southwest Oregon in general.

Following the increased aviation activity, there were some glitches in communication the first few days, with instances of

pilots, unfamiliar with the area, not using the published radio frequency to report their positions; and pilots calling their positions north of the airport when they were actually south, according to Graves who also noted other minor incidents.

Graves met with the USFS Air Operations Director Joanne Overacker and the Ground Logistics Manager Bjorn Burgeson on August 14 to make sure that they were getting all the support they needed from the county and the local aviation community.

Although Graves stressed that all the daily crew briefings should emphasize the necessity of using a particular radio frequency for all position and intention calls to aircraft in the vicinity of IV Airport, one traffic-pattern incident occurred on August 13 when an instructional flight in the pattern was cut off by a firefighting helicopter making a descent.

"It's likely this situation arose due to the helicopter

pilot making his position calls on the wrong frequency, and not hearing any response or other traffic in the area, assumed no air traffic," Graves said. "The instructor pilot and his student could both see the helicopter at all times, and there was never any danger. It did look rather 'interesting' to people watching on the ground, however. Anyone with the ability to listen to both frequencies at the same time would have heard both aircraft calling in — they just never heard each other."

Graves also asked that the extremely heavy fuel tankers, which can weigh as much as 60,000 pounds, not use Smokejumper Way, the primary public access into the airport. The road was not built to carry such heavy loads. A dedicated tanker-access road was installed last year at the northeast side of the airport for this specific purpose.

See Helitack on A-10

