

# California wildfires reduce yearslong dreams to embers

By JONATHAN J. COOPER and ELLEN KNICKMEYER  
Associated Press

SANTA ROSA, Calif. — Jose Garnica worked for more than two decades to build up his dream home that was reduced to ashes in a matter of minutes by the deadly firestorm striking Northern California.

Garnica, who moved to the U.S. from Mexico over 20 years ago, had finally decided he could afford to upgrade parts of his Santa Rosa house after building a stable career with the local garbage company and saving nearly everything he and his wife earned.

Over the past two years, he replaced the siding and installed a new air conditioner, stainless steel appliances and new flooring. He bought a new 60-inch television. On Saturday, the 44-year-old got an estimate to replace the fence, one of the last items on his list.

But at 3:30 a.m. Monday, he watched his house become one of the more than 2,000 homes and businesses destroyed by the series of blazes across the region that had killed at least 17 people.

"You feel helpless," he said Tuesday. "There's nothing you can do. Everything, your whole life, goes through your mind in a minute. Everything you had done. I left all my family behind in Mexico to get a better life. Finally we were just coming to the comfort level, and this happens."

Garnica tried to save the home with a garden hose. He and a neighbor tried to cut open the neighbor's above-ground pool, hoping the water would protect their homes. In 15 minutes, the entire neighborhood caught fire, he said.

"If I knew this was going to happen, maybe those 45 minutes I spent trying to put



AP Photo/Ben Margot

**Jose Garnica, left, kisses his daughter Leslie Garnica in front of their home that was destroyed in the Coffey Park area of Santa Rosa, Calif., on Tuesday. An onslaught of wildfires across a wide swath of Northern California broke out almost simultaneously then grew exponentially, swallowing up properties from wineries to trailer parks and tearing through both tiny rural towns and urban subdivisions.**

the fire down, I should've just grabbed all the belongings," Garnica said. "But I didn't think it was going to happen."

Those destructive flames raced across the wine country of Napa and Sonoma counties and the coastal beauty of Mendocino further north, leaving little more than smoldering ashes and eye-stinging smoke in their wake. Whole neighborhoods are gone, with only brick chimneys and charred laundry machines to mark sites that were once family homes.

"This is just pure devastation, and it's going to take us a while to get out and comb through all of this," said Ken Pimlott, chief of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. He said the state had "several days of fire weather conditions to come."

In some torched neighborhoods, fire hydrants still had hoses attached, apparently

abandoned by firefighters who had to flee.

The wildfires already rank among the deadliest in California history, and officials expected the death toll to increase as the scope of destruction becomes clear. At least 185 people were injured during the blazes that cropped up Sunday night. Nearly 200 people were reported missing in Sonoma County alone.

David Leal, 55, and his wife and stepson salvaged a few decorative items from their Santa Rosa home, including a wind chime, tiles from the backsplash in the kitchen, a decorative sun and a cross.

"Our plan is to keep those things, and when we rebuild, they'll be mementos of what we've lived through, and of, just, resilience," Leal said. "It's hard not to get emotional."

In the meantime, Leal got a post office box so the family can get mail, a new laptop and some clothes. They're liv-

ing out of their two vehicles for now.

"We'll be back home again sooner than later, and with our chins held high," he said, choking back tears. "And hopefully we'll be amongst our neighbors and friends as they do the same."

Leal, a U.S. Navy veteran, evacuated with his family, two dogs and cat to nearby Petaluma late Sunday after seeing fierce, hot winds and flames whipping in the distance.

"We didn't have time to think about what to grab. We grabbed what we saw," he said. He got his external hard drive, which was lying out, but left his laptop.

Garnica also hung onto hope, saying he was not back at square one.

"I came into the States with nothing. I didn't have anything," Garnica said. "I think I'm better off than how I came in. At least I got a job. I got a family. I'm healthy."

# Seaside: City councilors relied on testimony, input from school district

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Both these designations will be changed to institutional campus as a result of Monday's approval, clearing the way for the campus, with a total project budget of almost \$113 million.

In making their decision, city councilors relied on testimony and input from the school district, the comprehensive plan, and Planning Commission decisions.

Late changes and updates to the ordinance contained revised tax lot numbers and other minor changes, consultant Greg Winterowd of Winterbrook Planning said.

"What the new ordinance does is make sure we are talking about the right properties," Winterowd said.

Planning Director Kevin Cupples delivered revised findings, along with a response sheet directed to public concerns.

Findings determine the two ordinances comply with state planning goals as well as city and county review standards.

During a public comment

period, John Dunzer, a resident, presented a summary of an appeal he planned to submit to the state Land Use Board of Appeals.

In previous meetings, Dunzer said the city could find alternate sites within the urban growth boundary that did not require building a new campus.

Mayor Jay Barber and councilors Tita Montero, Dana Phillips and Steve Wright voted for the rezoning and comprehensive plan change. Randy Frank, Tom Horning and Seth Morrissey were absent.

Architects Dull Olson Weekes anticipate the design phase to reach next June, when construction could begin. The campus is slated for opening in the fall of 2020.

"We're still in the design-development phase and that's a long, complex process," Roley said. "The City Council has been very helpful in guiding us through this process properly."

Approval is subject to the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners and takes effect upon the board's approval.



Greg Winterowd

**'What the new ordinance does is make sure we are talking about the right properties.'**

Greg Winterowd  
consultant

# Trial: Battle for control of Astoria hotel

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A majority of the Port Commission was on hand Tuesday to observe the case. Weston, now the city manager of King City in Washington County, was the first witness called by Param's lawyer, Colin Hunter.

## A new tenant

As the Port's property manager and later the director of business development and operations, Weston's job was to find tenants and negotiate many of the agency's leases. He helped create the lease for Smithart. By the time Sonpatki came into the picture, Weston was the interim executive director, after the resignation of Hank Bynaker.

With the Port's lawyers claiming there was no signed contract with Param, Hunter sought to show how, despite Smithart falling behind on rent and revenue-sharing and his original business partner leaving, the agency did not evict him, and at times did not strictly follow the terms of the lease.

It was Weston who got the pulse of the Port Commission and eventually developed an agreement that would have Sonpatki take over the remainder of Smithart's lease, with a 10-year extension option, in exchange for paying off Smithart's debts and investing in the run-down hotel. An agreement was presented to the commission by October 2014, along with a presentation by Sonpatki, but Weston said commissioners repeatedly asked for more information on the prospective tenant.

Knight started work as the Port's executive director later that month. Weston reverted to his position as director of business development and operations, and Knight eventually took over negotiations on the Riverwalk Inn. By early July of 2015, the Port had terminated Smithart's lease.

"I certainly had nothing to do with the notice of default," Weston said, adding his sus-

picion that there might have been some other issues with Smithart.

## A stalled transfer

Hunter later called to the stand Sonpatki, who owns and operates 13 hotels in the Portland metro area and Seaside.

By June 2014, Sonpatki said, he and Smithart had agreed on \$500,000 for him to take over operation of the hotel. Smithart would receive the remainder of the money after debts he owed to the Port, city and county were paid.

By January 2015, Sonpatki said, he and Smithart were ready to close the deal, but had to continually extend the closing date as the Port did not provide the required consent documents. The two eventually

agreed to extend the transfer to September 2015, allowing Smithart to earn summer revenue to help pay down some of his debts.

In June 2015, the Port Commission voted unanimously to have staff execute the transfer of the remaining two years of Smithart's lease, along with a five-year extension option, to Sonpatki. By that point, Smithart owed more than \$300,000 combined to the Port, city and county.

"I wanted to come to Astoria," Sonpatki said of the deal, adding he hoped it would eventually lead to a longer lease.

But his acquisition was never finalized. Hunter and Sonpatki claim Knight repeatedly provided incorrect documents and never explained

why it was taking the Port so long to finalize Param's acquisition of Smithart's lease.

The Port terminated Smithart's contract shortly after the vote but kept him in the hotel on a short-term basis, not wanting to shut down and lose revenue. After Smithart's lease had been terminated, Sonpatki said, he came with his lawyer to Astoria to try and get the lease reinstated and the transfer finished, but to no avail.

The Port eventually heard presentations from several suitors for the hotel, including Sonpatki, and in September 2015 chose Astoria Hospitality Ventures.

The trial recessed Tuesday with Sonpatki still on the stand and Hunter still making his case.

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**Q: Should I use heat or cold?**

**A:** If you hurt, especially in a joint, use ice; it reduces inflammation and pain and shortens healing time. You can get a burn from ice just like with heat, so don't leave it on for more than 20 minutes. Most problems get better more quickly with ice. Heat feels good, but may seriously make problems worse. As long as there is pain and/or swelling, continue ice; it can be done as often as once an hour. Would you heat a cut? No, because it would keep bleeding—that is what happens inside where you can't see it.

JEFFREY M. LEINASSAR  
DMD, FAGD

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**Q: The edges of my front teeth are wearing. What can I do?**

**A:** This is a common finding on many patients. The reasons can be from misaligned teeth, harmful habits or excess grinding and bite forces. The latter is a very common problem that needs to be addressed. Orthodontic correction and nighttime bite guards are good choices to help prevent further wear.