

Fast-moving flames force people to flee on a moment's notice

FALLBROOK, Calif. (AP) — Flames were practically on top of Dick and Joan Marsala's home when they got an urgent knock on the door and were told to leave.

The couple, in their mid-80s, grabbed only a change of clothes and medications before fleeing Thursday through wind gusts and smoke as fire swallowed the row of mobile homes behind their place in the Rancho Monserate Country Club north of San Diego.

It's a story that has played out in communities across much of Southern California this week as ferocious winds whipped sparks into massive infernos that have destroyed more than 500 buildings, killed dozens of horses and forced hundreds of thousands of people to run from fires that have burned nearly 250 square miles since Monday.

The flames that tore through Fallbrook, self-proclaimed "Avocado Capital of the World," and nearby Bonsall, home to a premier race-horse training facility, traveled so far that even people who found temporary refuge had to move again when the fires got too close.

Flames sprang up so quickly and moved so fast that three people were burned Thursday trying to escape. Many of those who managed to get out unscathed did so with only the clothes on their backs after abandoning a lifetime of possessions to fate.

The Marsalas and other unlucky homeowners returned Friday to find their homes in ruins.

Dick Marsala was too overwhelmed to speak as he searched through the smoldering remnants in search of his wallet. It was still too hot, so he climbed back out. Peering through a broken window, he spotted a framed photo still hanging



Dick Marsala looks through debris from his destroyed home after a wildfire roared through the Rancho Monserate Country Club Friday in Bonsall, Calif. The wind-swept blazes have forced tens of thousands of evacuations and destroyed dozens of homes in Southern California.

AP Photo/Gregory Bull

on a blackened wall. It was a picture of him golfing.

"I'll be darned," he said, his eyes tearing up as he put on sunglasses.

The charred gray remains of much of the 55-and-over community stood in stark contrast to the bright green nine-hole golf course where Marsala and others in the community played regularly.

Many residents were on the course when the fire swept into the area, driven by dry desert Santa Ana winds that surpassed 35 mph. That was too fast for firefighters to stop the flames.

"The crews were trying to stay

out ahead of this as quickly as they could," said Capt. Kendal Bortisser of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention. "As we know, when a tornado hits the Midwest, there's no stopping it. When a hurricane hits the East Coast, there's no stopping it. When Santa Ana winds come in, there's no stopping them."

Tom Metier was brushing his teeth to get ready for a doctor's appointment when sheriff's deputies pulled up and yelled, "Get out now!"

He grabbed the key to his safety deposit box, prescription pills and some cash. Winds were howling

outside, and flames leaped through the brush on a nearby hillside.

Metier, who expected to lose everything, was surprised to find his place intact Friday. He zipped through the mobile home park in a golf cart, fielding calls from neighbors and reporting whose homes survived and whose were gone.

More than a third of the community's 213 mobile homes burned as the fire zigzagged along a hillside, skipping some streets and razing others. On one street, all 24 mobile homes were gone, with only hulls of cars and stoves left.

"It's really horrible to see some

of these little streets look like a moonscape," he told a friend whose home was reduced to black rubble.

The fire 50 miles north of San Diego ignited for unknown reasons and destroyed at least 85 structures as it burned 6 square miles.

Meanwhile, firefighters northwest of Los Angeles gained some control over the largest and most destructive fire in the state, which destroyed 430 buildings. The blaze in Ventura County grew to 206 square miles since igniting Monday.

Along the coast between Ventura and Santa Barbara, tiny communities had so far survived close calls. Slopes along U.S. 101 were blackened, but homes still stood at La Conchita and Faria Beach. Sections of Carpinteria were under mandatory or voluntary evacuation orders, but no flames were in sight.

Fire crews made enough progress against other large fires around LA to lift most evacuation orders.

The Fallbrook fire broke out along State Highway 76 and quickly jumped six lanes to the other side.

Horse trainers took stock of the damage at the elite San Luis Rey Downs training facility for thoroughbreds in Bonsall, where many of the more than 450 horses were cut loose to prevent them from being trapped in burning stables.

Frantic herds galloped through smoke and past flaming palm trees in a chaotic escape from a normally idyllic place.

"We almost got trampled to death," trainer Kim Marrs said. "One gal got knocked down. I thought she was going to get crushed. You just had to stand there and pray they didn't hit you."

Most of the loose horses were corralled and taken to Del Mar Fairgrounds, but about 25 died as barns and pasture burned.

BRIEFLY

Trump signs 2-week spending bill to avoid shutdown

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Friday signed a spending bill to avoid a government shutdown and keep the federal government running through Dec. 22.

The president signed the two-week spending measure in private at the White House after the House and Senate acted to prevent a government shutdown this weekend.

The funding reprieve comes as the White House and congressional leaders are negotiating a longer-term agreement, building off a Thursday meeting involving Trump and congressional leaders.

The White House and lawmakers said the bill will give them more time to negotiate several end-of-the-year agenda items, including the budget, a children's health program and hurricane aid. Administration and congressional aides were continuing the talks on Friday.

"We hope that we're going to make some great progress for our country. I think that will happen," Trump said Thursday in the Oval Office. Added Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York: "Funding the government is extremely important, helping our soldiers is very important and helping average citizens is very important. So we're here in the spirit of: Let's get it done."

Obama: Protect democracy or risk path of Nazi Germany

CHICAGO (AP) — Former President Barack Obama says Americans must be vigilant in their defense of democracy or risk following the path of Nazi Germany in the 1930s.

At a speech earlier this week, the former president told the Economic Club of Chicago that "things can fall apart fairly quickly" if Americans don't "tend to this garden of democracy."

During the speech Tuesday, Obama pointed to Hitler's rise to power in Germany as he implored the audience to "pay attention ... and vote."

Obama also defended the media. He said the press "often drove me nuts" but that he understood that a free press was vital to democracy.

Ethics panel expands probe into GOP Rep. Farenthold

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Ethics Committee says it is expanding an investigation into sexual harassment allegations against Republican Rep. Blake Farenthold of Texas.

The committee said it will investigate whether Farenthold sexually harassed a former member of his staff and retaliated against her for complaining. The committee also said the panel would review allegations that Farenthold made inappropriate statements to other members of his staff.

Lauren Greene is a former communications director in the congressman's office. She alleged in a 2014 federal lawsuit that she was sexually harassed and fired soon after complaining of a hostile work environment. Farenthold said when the case was settled in 2015 that he didn't engage in any wrongdoing.

The committee had already been conducting a discretionary review of the matter and has examined more than 200,000 pages of materials and interviewed multiple witnesses. However, a press release announcing the subcommittee's formation said the resolution of the case had been significantly delayed by difficulties in obtaining testimony from key witnesses and in accessing confidential documents the parties exchanged as the lawsuit ongoing.

Men accused of bomb plot want Trump voters on jury

WICHITA, Kan. (AP) — Three men accused of plotting to bomb a mosque and apartment complex housing Somali refugees asked a federal judge Friday to include prospective jurors from rural western Kansas because they are twice as likely to have voted for President Donald Trump.

A defense motion argues that plans to only summon citizens in the more urban counties closest to the federal courthouse in Wichita is a discriminatory practice that excludes rural and conservative jurors.

Gavin Wright, Patrick Stein and Curtis Allen are charged with conspiracy to use a weapon of mass destruction and conspiracy against civil rights for allegedly planning to detonate truck bombs in Garden City the day after the November 2016 election. Wright also faces a charge of lying to the FBI.

Designed by Karli Kretschmer, Age 9, La Grande, OR. She was the winner of our annual Holiday Design Contest.

Donate This Holiday Season Toward These Great Causes During Our Annual

Community Bank Charity Drive

Community Bank will match up to \$500 (per branch) at 50¢ on every dollar collected through Dec. 20, 2017!

Donations at our Pendleton Branch will support:



Donations at our Hermiston Branch will support:

The Hermiston Warming Station

Donations at our Heppner Branch will support:

The Neighborhood Center Food Bank

Donations at our Milton-Freewater Branch will support:



Milton-Freewater City Light & Power Energy Assistance Program



PLUS - The City of Milton-Freewater will match the funds collected up to **\$5,000!**



Local Money Working For Local People

www.communitybanknet.com Member FDIC

Pendleton
157 S Main St
541-278-9000

Hermiston
50 E Theater Ln
541-289-4480

Heppner
127 N Main St
541-676-5745

Milton-Freewater
504 N Main St
541-938-6361

SYKES IS HIRING

WORK FOR A COMPANY AS original AS YOU ARE.



Save Time and Apply Online:

sykes.com/jobs

