

'Waiting for the Fire Truck'

Story #5 in 'Protecting Oakley Families—Residents Thank the First Responders of the East Contra Costa County Fire Protection District'

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It was the odd crackling sound and eerie orange glow in the night sky that jolted Phil Davis out of bed. It was almost midnight and when he looked out his window, he could see his next door neighbor's Italian cypress trees were in flames. From Phil's vantage point, it was the beginning of a 20 foot wall of destruction.

There is one time of the year we all hope a firefighter will be immediately available. That would be around the Fourth of July. On the evening of July 3rd, 2016, the jolting, but not unexpected, noise of fireworks exploding was simply annoying to Phil. In the court behind his home on Gardenia in Oakley, folks were celebrating by setting off some powerful holiday fireworks. Maybe the parties didn't have to work, but Phil had to begin his shift at 5:30 a.m. the next morning. He tried to go to bed around 11 p.m. even as the explosions continued. Sleep didn't come and the nightmare to come was all too real.

"When I saw the trees were on fire, I rounded up my dogs to keep them out of the way. Then I ran over. Someone had called 911. Sparks were flying everywhere and I grabbed my hose to try and help. My neighbor did, too."

Video of that night shows it looked more like a forest fire than a backyard blaze. (See the video on the City of Oakley website.) Trees in distress because of the ongoing drought can be dry as tinder on the inside even if they look fairly healthy. They provided the fuel in this case that night. Unfortunately, a garden hose or two is no match for a raging fire. "Neighbors began to run over but all we could really do was wait for the fire truck."

Minutes can feel like an eternity when you are waiting for a fire truck and the help it brings. Phil and his neighbors didn't know it at the time but the Oakley fire station on O'Hara was on a call in Antioch and other local stations were also responding to calls. There was a fire in Discovery Bay and Livermore firefighters could not respond either. "Then I remember seeing a fire truck from Alameda County."

Phil says he was as impressed with the professional way the situation was handled once the first responders arrived, as he was dismayed with the initial lack of local manpower.

"When those embers were flying, I would have done anything to have more fire protection in Oakley," Phil says. Please see the video to get a glimpse of Phil and Jennifer's experience.