Salute Our First Responders
First responders rush in, before knowing what they’re rushing into

By Aaron Crutchfield
For the Daily Independent

First responders, who are honor- ed this year on Oct. 28 on Na- tional First Responders Day, of- ten find themselves rushing into harm’s way to save lives, even if they don’t know ahead of time what they’re rushing into.

“Most of the time, we have very lim- ited information initially. It’ll be a 911 call or a phone call from a neighbor for an unknown situation,” said Ridgecrest Police Department Sgt. Justin Dampier. “So a lot of times we go into situations blind, and we’ll have to fig- ure out in a short time period what’s going on, so that’s usually the biggest challenge.”

One example Dampier recalls is what was called in as an unknown situation in the desert near the old Walmart on West Bowman Road, which turned out to be a single-vehicle car crash.

“I come up, first officer on scene, and there’s a car on its side in the mid- dle of the dirt there. The woman inside was cut up and bleeding quite a bit, and the vehicle was swaying like it was going to fall on its top, further injuring her. I remember standing there bracing myself, trying to hold this car up until the fire department got on scene and was able to tie it off,” Dampier said.

“Listening to this lady who was in serious pain and was seriously injured, even though it was probably only 30 seconds or 45 seconds before the next guy came up, it feels like an eternity. It was probably 15, 16 years ago, but it really sticks in my mind about getting somewhere and not knowing until you’re staring the depth or how severe the situation is.”

Although police officers are often the first on scene in emergencies, the first responder community branches out much further, including firefight- ers, paramedics and medical staff at hospitals, all of whom have to be pre- pared at the drop of a hat for nearly any situation.

“Ridgecrest Police Department is deeply appreciative of our partners in the area – Liberty Ambulance, the med- ical professionals at Ridgecrest Re- gional Hospital, the Kern County Fire Department,” Dampier said. “I’ve worked in a lot of places; I’ve been lucky to be on different task forces and see law enforcement and first respon- ders in all areas of the state, and what we have on the east side of the county and specifically here in Ridgecrest is just amazing. I’m so appreciative of the hard work of our fellow co-work- ers and our peers, and I’d like to be here in this community working with them.”

By Aaron Crutchfield
For the Daily Independent

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Mayor Breeden offers thanks to first responders

By Aaron Crutchfield
For the Daily Independent

Ridgecrest Mayor Peggy Breeden offered her thanks for first responders in honor of National First Responders Day, which is 9/11 each year.

“They are the giants among all the people who help make our lives better,” Breeden said. “So many of them do it with little or no pay on a voluntary basis. Others worked because it’s their job, because they love and care for each community. It’s not an easy job and it’s mostly thankless, and we owe a huge debt of gratitude.”

Although Breeden said the work first responders do goes well beyond the Ridgecrest 6.4 and 7.1 earthquakes of July 16, those earthquakes did bring the first responders to the forefront.

“We’re watching everybody going all directions, doing their jobs for which they’ve been trained, doing an exemplary job of trying to keep calm and solve solutions, and Mick [Gleason, Kern County Supervisor] and I look at each other and say, ‘What do we do?’ They’re all trained, they know what to do. Of course, by the next day we all knew what we had to do. We had to bring us all together,” Breeden said.

“It was amazing because there was no way to thank those people who had done so much.”

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— Mayor Peggy Breeden

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Suzanne Ford, Owner
As we continue to combat historic wildfires across our state, including in the Sequoia National Forest in Tulare County, I am grateful to the federal, state, and local firefighters and first responders who are working around the clock to protect all Californians.

Most recently, I was pleased the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) awarded the Kern County Fire Department (KCFD) nearly $2.9 million (over $2.6 million in federal dollars, matched by roughly $300,000 by KCFD) to replace their nearly 20 year-old personal breathing equipment with state-of-the-art self-contained breathing apparatus to enhance firefighter response. KCFD estimates this new equipment will lead to an increase in oxygen supply from 30 to 45 minutes. To that end, I sent Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf a letter in support of KCFD’s grant application earlier this year because it is crucial that the men and women fighting fires have advanced equipment to best protect themselves from the flames and smoke.

Additionally, Congress provided $100 million in funding through the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which I supported, to help fire departments across the nation purchase personal protective equipment and other necessary supplies to protect their employees during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Kern County Fire Department received nearly $275,000 of these funds to help keep our local firefighters healthy so that they can continue to protect their fellow Californians when fighting wildfires.

In September, FEMA awarded Tulare County a Fire Management Assistance Grant or FMAG, which I support, for the SQF Fire Complex. With

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Rear Adm. Scott Dillon, Commander, Naval Air Warfare Center Weapons Division, offered the following statement for National First Responders Day:

"In the military, we are called upon to render aid, defend our borders, and answer the nation’s call at a moment’s notice around the clock and around the world. Closer to home, it’s the first responders who heed the call. This past year and a half has been difficult, between earthquakes and wildfires and COVID-19, our communities have been challenged like never before. At the intersection of all those challenges are the first responders – saving lives, protecting property, and holding our communities together when it seems difficult to move forward.

"Thank you to those friends and neighbors who, when disaster strikes, move past their own cares and dedicate themselves to the public good. When fires approach, earthquakes strike, and pandemics rage, they think not of themselves, but of others, and for that, they deserve praise, recognition, and above all respect. Thank you for all you do.”

Wednesday, October 28, 2020 www.ridgecrestca.com

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Rear Adm. Scott Dillon

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The other victims: First responders to horrific disasters often suffer in solitude

By Heidi de Marco
Kaiser Health News

The day a gunman fired into a crowd of 22,500 people at the country music festival in Las Vegas, hospital nursing supervisor Antoinette Mullan was focused on one thing: saving lives. She recalls dead bodies on gurneys across the triage floor, a trauma bay full of victims. But “in that moment, we’re not aware of anything else but taking care of what’s in front of us,” Mullan said.

Proud as she was of the work her team did, she calls it “the most horrific evening of my life” — the culmination of years of caring experiences she has tried to work through, mostly on her own.

“I can tell you that after 30 years, I still have emotional breakdowns and I never know when it’s going to hit me,” said Mullan.

Calamities seem to be multiplying in recent years, including mass shootings.

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Some firefighters, emergency medical providers, law enforcement officers and others say the scale, tragedy and sometimes gruesomeness of their experiences haunt them, leading to profound sadness and depression, job burnout, substance abuse, relationship problems and even suicide.

The other victims: First responders to horrific disasters often suffer in solitude
As California’s first responders continued to battle emergency conditions throughout the state in 2019, Gov. Gavin Newsom took time on National First Responders Day to recognize their service, as well as the generous assistance of other states in this all-hands-on-deck effort. "Our first responders are the people who rush into danger on behalf of their communities – and sometimes, not even their own communities, as we have seen throughout the state in recent days," Newsom said. "We are thankful to the men and women in uniform who have traveled far and wide to assist in emergency response throughout California. Indeed, it is in times of crisis that we are reminded of our common humanity and what it truly means to be a good neighbor. On National First Responders Day and every day, we are grateful for their service."

Hundreds of local jurisdictions, six state agencies and several other states have sent or will send teams of first responders to assist with fighting fires, evacuations, and public safety. The Governor also extended his thanks to the thousands of other first responders from local communities across the state for their efforts throughout the year.

On National First Responders Day, Newsom thanks thousands responding to Calif. emergencies

PHOTO COURTESY OFFICE OF GOV. GAVIN NEWSOM

"Thank you to the brave first responders who put their lives on the line to keep our community safe.”

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“Thank you to the brave first responders who put their lives on the line to keep our community safe.”

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Paid for by Kevin McCarthy for Congress
Many of the men and women who responded to these tragedies have become heroes and victims at once. Some firefighters, emergency medical providers, law enforcement officers and others say the scale, sadness and sometimes sheer gruesomeness of their experiences haunt them, leading to fearfulness and depression, job burnout, substance abuse, relationship problems, even suicide.

"I don't have this sense that I need to go and speak to someone," said Mullan. "Maybe I do, and I just don't know it."

In 2017, there were 340 mass shoot- ings nationwide, including the Las Ve-gas massacre — one of the deadliest in U.S. history — according to Gun Vio- lence Archive, a nonprofit organization that tracks the country's gun-related deaths and defines them as ones in which four or more people are killed or injured.

The "first responders" who provide emergency aid have been hit hard not just by recent large-scale disasters but by the accumulation of stress and trauma over many years, research shows. Many studies have found elevated rates of post-traumatic stress disorder among nurses, firefighters and para- medics. A 2016 report by the Interna-tional Association of Fire Fighters found that firefighters and paramedics are exhibiting levels of PTSD similar to that of combat veterans.

Experts have found a dearth of re-search on treatment, insufficient prep-aration by employers for traumat-ic events and significant stigma associ- ated with seeking care for the emo- tional fallout of these events.

"When we have these national disas- ters or have a guy take a truck and run people over ... those are added stress-ors we aren’t prepared for," said Jeff Dill, a former firefighter and licensed counselor.

Dill said the emotional toll of these large-scale horrific events is magnified because everyone is talking about them. They are inseparable and become emotional "trigger points."

"Anniversaries are the hardest," he said. Some employers are working on de-veloping greater peer support, he said, but it often comes after the fact rather than proactively. "We met a lot of re-sistance early on because of the [stoic] culture," said Dill, who travels the country teaching mental health awareness workshops for firefighters and other emergency personnel.

He said the culture is slowly shifting — particularly because of the rise in mass public shootings across the coun-try.

"I supported a Major Disaster Declara- tion request to provide critical federal funds to help Californians rebuild fol-lowing these devastating fires, which President Trump expeditiously ap-proved. But unfortunately, fires con-tinue to burn. This is why just a week ago, I sent another letter supporting a second Major Disaster Declaration to help Californians recover from addi-tional fires not covered in the first decla-ration.

Our firefighters are more important now than ever, and as they work to end these fires, I remain committed to working with local officials and the State of California to bring federal re-sources to our region so that our com-munities can swiftly recover.

God Bless,
Kevin McCarthy
Join us as we show appreciation for our local heroes who put their lives on the line to keep us safe.

We would like to take this opportunity to honor the service and sacrifice of these remarkable public servants and celebrate their courage, strength and dedication to our communities.