



Michele_Steinberg Welcome to today's Firewise chat session. And thank you for joining us. Today's chat will feature information about the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation. Napa County, California, is well-known as the home of the premier wine-producing region in the United States. What you may not know is that seventy-five percent of the county's 500,000 acres is considered a high fire risk environment. We're going to hear more about what community leaders are doing to address wildfire risk there. My name is Michele Steinberg and I am the support manager for the national Firewise Communities Program. Judith Leraas Cook, project manager for Firewise Communities/USA, and I will moderate today's session. Welcome, Judith!

Judith_Leraas_Cook Good morning! This is going to be a really interesting session. Thank you all for taking the time to join us.

Michele_Steinberg Thanks, Judith. We are delighted to have Stephen Gort as our chat guest today. Stephen is a Director and Treasurer of the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation. He also manages the Firewise program for the community of Circle Oaks in Napa County, a nationally recognized Firewise Communities/USA site. Please hold your questions until the end of the presentation. The chat will then become completely interactive. We encourage you to join in at that time. Stephen, can you tell us more about how the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation was formed and what your goals are?

Stephen_Gort Good Morning everyone. Like many organizations, we got started with trying to raise awareness. The org. started in 2004, and shortly after a chipping program was added.

Michele_Steinberg Stephen, how has the organization evolved, and can you speak about your "County vs. Community" approach?

Stephen_Gort I'm glad you've asked about this. We want to be sure that everyone understands that we are not attempting to tinker with the Firewise Community Model. In fact, we are trying to promote and facilitate the concept. As Napa Firewise grew, it became evident that there is a gap between a community's desire to do something about fire safety, and their ability to put meaningful plans and projects into action, from a standing start. We have established and grown Napa Firewise to act as a "super agency" to help communities

throughout their growth cycle. We divided the County into 16 "Communities", and set a goal to enable 4 communities per year, thereby covering the whole County in four years. We are working to fill the gap between communities and text book concepts about fire safety, with hands-on, local expertise, and a broad range of real time support.

Michele_Steinberg It's a really interesting organization! How is the organization funded, and how do you use your resources to reduce risks in Napa County?

Stephen_Gort The organization got started with traditional grants, several from the US Forest Service and others from the Bay Area Air Quality District and from Fireman's Fund Insurance Company. We have since pursued getting 501(3)(c) status, and are embarking on a large-scale donations process. We use our funding and resources in a whole variety of activities. We engage in all of the traditional awareness avenues such as publications, newspaper articles, brochures, Home Ignition Zone Workshops. One of our main focus areas is getting communities "up-and-running". We target 4 communities a year, and in order to get them engaged we provide a whole host of FREE services, the foundation:

- Provides necessary education and support for the local community "sparkplug"
- Conducts awareness meetings for the community to secure initial interest
- Provides the services of a defensible space consultant to establish basic community needs
- Helps the community to empanel a fire safety committee
- Conducts two or three CWPP planning meetings to formalize the community's plan and helps establish priorities for its projects
- Provides the funding and project management assistance for an early project such as preparing a community fire break
- Provides these start-ups with consulting help on grant writing and the Foundation acts as a fiscal sponsor for grants until these communities can stand alone. This includes accounting support and grant status reporting.

Michele_Steinberg Excellent! You mentioned to me prior to the chat that the creation of community fire breaks are projects that show an early, visible success which breed further community interest and involvement. The Foundation started a successful chipping program for residents back in 2005. Can you tell us more about how that started and what kind of progress has occurred?

Stephen_Gort This is one of our proudest achievements, and it had an amusing beginning. The local Bay Air Quality District board wanted to reduce or ban burning. Napa Firewise said: "If you don't want us to burn, give us a chipper"and they did! The equipment was funded by both the air quality people and a grant from Fireman's Fund Insurance Company. The local Cal Fire organization provides the supervision and equipment maintenance, and manpower is provided by the County Corrections Department - with low risk inmates. In 2005, chipping was provided for 40 days and processed 9,000 cubic yards. In 2006, 40 days and processed 11,000 cubic yards. In 2007, 120+ days and processed 26,000 cubic yards. In 2008, 240+ days and processed 140,000 cubic yards. This service is free to County residents. Using a website function, citizens describe the size and location of their curbside brush pile, and it is chipped, usually within 10 days.

Michele_Steinberg An upcoming Firewise newsletter issue will have an article enumerating the Foundation's accomplishments. What are some of the highlights?

Stephen_Gort I believe the article is already up on the site. Some things we've done.....

- Hosted 30 community meetings to promote wildland fire awareness and explain state and local fire code regulations
- Cleared nearly 600 acres of dry wildland vegetation using goats and labor provided by county inmates; Provided more than 150 hours of consulting for communities involved in developing wildland fire protection plans (CWPP)
- Trained fire service personnel and private contractors in defensible space regulations and home inspection techniques; Conducted more than 250 free defensible space home inspections
- Produced and distributed over 250,000 postcards, brochures and newsletters throughout Napa County on fire awareness and prevention; Communicated vital information on fire prevention, preparedness, and defensible space regulations via advertising and public relations, including: direct mail and Public Service Announcements
- Authored numerous articles on fire topics for the Napa Valley Register and other local publications; Developed a series of highway signs, strategically placed throughout the county, promoting defensible space and wildland fire awareness
- Finally - Secured \$516,200 of grant funding to support ongoing programs and activities. More than \$95,000 of in-kind service from the Fire Services More than \$426,000 of in-kind services from Napa County residents.

Michele_Steinberg

That's an impressive list. Stephen, what would you say are your biggest challenges? And what do you see as the biggest needs for the future of wildfire safety for Napa residents?

Stephen_Gort Three major things come to mind:

The first is everyone's concern - funding. In the current economic environment, getting grants and contributions will be a major challenge. We have acquired 501(3)(c) status, but we are new at the fundraising game.

The second will be a similar note as well – overcoming the belief that “..it won't happen here, but if it does, the fire department will protect us”. Needless to say, the notion of a fire engine and crew protecting every home is just not realistic. As residents realize the risk to themselves and their community, they too often lack the resources and the know-how to take the next steps, without help....hence our “community enabling” approach.

Finally, the program has had its share of success but needless to say, without the unwavering support of our fire services organizations, our volunteers, and that of residents who have performed about 22,000 hours of volunteer labor we could not have come this far. We will need all of this to continue. We hope to get all 16 “Communities” up and running, and therefore become a Firewise County.

Michele_Steinberg Stephen, thank you for sharing this exciting information about the Napa Communities Firewise Foundation activity and progress. We'll post a transcript of

this chat on the Firewise website shortly. Now I'd like to open the chat to our participants to ask you questions. The chat is now open to everyone.

mike_frost Excellent presentation Stephen. You've done an amazing job in Napa. We're trying to do some of the same things in Whitefish, MT. How did you reach out to community "sparkplugs" to get things going on the ground?

Stephen_Gort Always a challenge to find the spark plug. We do mass mailings in a community to announce an HIZ workshop. Once we have people in the room, we try to figure-out who is most excited. Our CalFire colleagues are also a big help, because they know the communities and many residents.

DAVID_YEGGE Stephen Good job!! My question is how are you able to track the in kind services provided by the residence? I have thought about this, but I have no way of tracking it.

Stephen_Gort We have a major database on our web site which captures the chipping information along with the hours the resident spent building it. Also, once communities are established, we provide their committee with a form then can have residents fill-in.

mike_frost What is the address of your web site?

DAVID_YEGGE Excellent. I was thinking of doing the exact same thing. In this way the residence can plug in the hours spent correct?

Michele_Steinberg David, the Firewise website includes forms you can use for residents to fill out as they work on their own. It's at http://www.firewise.org/usa/volunteer_forms.htm. Great idea to have it in a web-based format.

Stephen_Gort Exactly. Once communities get rolling, they also use the form and a simple excel spreadsheet - which we collect every two or three months.

Mindy_Block Would our book publication - Sunrise Fire - be of use to educate preteens and the young at heart about fire awareness - would it be useful to you?

Stephen_Gort You can see our web application at <http://www.napafirewise.org>.

mike_frost Thanks. How does one get a copy of "Sunrise Fire"?

Stephen_Gort Mindy - I'm not familiar with your book....would like to see it too.

Mindy_Block <http://www.qualityparks.org/content/sunrise-fire>

mike_frost Thanks. I'll check it out.

Mindy_Block We are just setting up sellers. And it's not on Amazon, because I want more proceeds to benefit charities. thanks

Judith_Leraas_Cook Mindy - You might want to acquaint yourself with the new Firewise area called Firewise Generations - www.firewise.org/fw-generation. It targets our youth audience. Stephen - Do you concentrate exclusive on Napa County, or are you being drawn into other nearby areas of the state?

Stephen_Gort No - we are strictly a Napa County organization. The way CalFire is organized (by County), makes the linkage work if we started going over County and CalFire boundaries, it would increase the complexity of our support infrastructure.

Mindy_Block Who posts the fire danger signs?

Stephen_Gort The City of Napa has a sign shop - they produce our signs for free, Cal Fire places them....

Mindy_Block And that Stay and Defend policy - any new talk about that in Napa - either way?

Stephen_Gort Not as yet. The California Fire Chiefs Assoc. has basically said they are not yet ready to organize and sponsor it yet.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Stephen - we are often asked about defensible space consultants. Are you looking to CALFIRE for those? Or do you have a stable of available folks?

Stephen_Gort A little of both. We have a hired consultant that we provide for the "start-ups", but we've also trained and "certified" local vendors. CalFire fills-in when needed.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Thanks! Do you work through CALFIRE to get the goats and the reduced-cost labor from County inmates? Am interested in knowing how you approach this.

Stephen_Gort The Foundation contracts directly with the goat vendors. CalFire manages the relationship with CDC, and they supervise and manage the crews. The crews (of 20-30) only cost us \$200 a day, and I pay for the port-o-potty.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Thank you!!

Michele_Steinberg Stephen, I am interested in why Napa went with a Firewise foundation rather than a Fire Safe Council structure, as I know how widespread the FSC model is in California.

Tracy_Price What was the event or spark that made you guys decide that Firewise was a priority in your community?

DAVID_YEGGE We are enacting a new policy for consultants in the wake of the demand that we are seeing from insurance companies mandating that prior to renewal that we provide the property owners a letter that states they meet defensible space requirements. Stephen do you have any thoughts on this?

Stephen_Gort Tracy - probably the spark for me was receiving Firewise certification in my own community....some of the individual communities use the FSC model...it's no problem, we all get along. David - We are trying to work with the Calif. Legislature to try and get insurance company requirements and California requirements synced..

mike_frost Goat vendors? I must have missed something. What's that about?

Tracy_Price Thanks!

Stephen_Gort At present insurance companies are setting standard that are more strict than legal requirements.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Mike - I think Stephen can tell you, but goats are used in numerous communities in the West. Another one is just outside Salt Lake City.

Mindy_Block About that defensible space requirement - i was talking to Mark - as there are two ways to look at it - from setback and clearances versus vegetative community type and landscapes. Which do you follow?

DAVID_YEGGE With the passage of SB 1595 we are a lot closer. As it stands we do provide a certificate if and when the property owner meets both local and state defensible space standards. We are just getting inundated.

Stephen_Gort Mike - we use goat herds when terrain is right for them to clear. They eat brush, grasses, chamise, etc.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Do you find the community receives the goats well, Stephen?

Stephen_Gort Usually - yes. The goat companies have wised-up to community relations. They even have "celebrity goats" who are strictly used for community relations....

mike_frost Very interesting. We have a lot of old goats in MT. Thanks.

Stephen_Gort they will hold a meet the goats day with these celebrities a week before the project starts, and they have a petting zoo for the kids.

Judith_Leraas_Cook

Mike - It has been popular in our part of the country to make use of them. It does take a little public relations work in some communities, as Stephen noted.

Stephen_Gort Someone asked about defensible space standards - - in California it is 100' around all buildings.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Are you finding that to be working well for you? We in other states are most interested in the legislation.

Mindy_Block yeah me. If we set back that much, we'd have no park left

DAVID_YEGGE Or to property line!

Mindy_Block what about on other side of property line - ideas for the park manager?

Stephen_Gort Well - that's a misnomer....we're not talking about clear-cutting 100'. Just removing brush and limbing up trees to 10-12 feet.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Mindy - Firewise Communities is based on the concept of the home ignition zone....mitigating the 100 feet around a structure. You can learn about it in the Firewise You Can Use area at www.firewise.org. Mitigation is the key....not clear cutting, as Stephen noted.

DAVID_YEGG Yes, Judith it originated from the research that Jack Cohen did. That is how we came up with 100 feet.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Thank you, David! You are exactly correct.

Stephen_Gort In Napa County, we now have a "Fire Hazard Abatement Ordinance" The county does inspections, if they find a problem property, they give the owner direction and 21 days to fix the problem....

Kgullickson Goat Vendors are people that own goats and rent them out, usually for control of weeds. For large ac. horses and cattle also work well for the reduction of fine fuels.

Judith_Leraas_Cook True!

DAVID_YEGGE It still is difficult to enforce when some properties are only 25 feet wide.

Stephen_Gort if on re-inspection it hasn't been done, they bring in a vendor to do the work, bill the land owner, along with a fine.

mike_frost Does this have the support of the community?

Stephen_Gort It's the law, and it is working.

mike_frost Great.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Stephen - Your work has really made a difference in Napa County over a several year period. What we have found that this program is really one bite at a time one community at a time. Once folks understand the mitigation concepts, it all becomes routine for them. Do you find retention to be a challenge at this point?

Mindy_Block It's sounds great.

Stephen_Gort I agree - with our current resources, we are trying to get 4 communities started a year - and finish the County (16 communities) in four years.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Good plan!

DAVID_YEGGE Keep up the great work Stephen. Thanks for the info.

Judith_Leraas_Cook And we really appreciate your coming in to be our speaker! You've given us all a lot to think about.

mike_frost Very interesting chat. I've come away with a number of good ideas that we'll try to use in MT. Thanks Stephen, Michele, Judith, and everyone.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Our pleasure, Mike. Have a great time in Maui!!

Stephen_Gort You're all very welcome - -check out our article in the latest Firewise newsletter.

Michele_Steinberg Thank you very much, Stephen, and to everyone for participating. A very lively chat indeed. Yes, do check out the newsletter! If you have questions after the chat, you can contact me at msteinberg@nfpa.org. I will either respond directly or put you into contact with someone who can provide the information you need.

Stephen_Gort Feel free to email me as well at: treasurer@napafirewise.org

Michele_Steinberg And if folks are not already registered on MyFirewise, I highly recommend it a a way of staying informed and connected. You can find it on the top menu bar of the Firewise home page.

Mindy_Block will do

Michele_Steinberg We are right at the 2:00 hour here on the East Coast, so we'll wrap the chat now. Thank you all so much for the excellent discussion.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Good to chat with all of you!!

Mindy_Block bye

Judith_Leraas_Cook Bye, Mindy.

Stephen_Gort Adios muchachos

Judith_Leraas_Cook Adios!!

mike_frost Take care. I'm going to watch the whales jump.

Michele_Steinberg Hasta la vista. Cheers - talk with you all later.