



Transcript
Firewise Communities Chat Session
June 11, 2008

Judith_Leraas_Cook Welcome to today's Firewise chat session. And thank you for joining us. Today's chat guest is David Jaramillo with the Sierra Forest Legacy. David collaborates with Firewise Communities and CALFIRE in promoting Firewise principles throughout the Sierra Nevada region of California. He will tell us about this very interesting partnership and how he conducts his successful outreach effort. We will also be talking about community wildfire readiness efforts. David's first baby, little Noah, was born just five days ago. I think he is a little bleary-eyed today! My name is Judith Leraas Cook and I am the project manager for Firewise Communities/USA. Michele Steinberg, Support Manager for the Firewise program, and I will moderate today's chat. Welcome Michele! David, we are so pleased you are able to join us today.

Michele_Steinberg Thanks, Judith.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Before we get going, I would like to let our guests know that you are a registered forester with the state of California and work with the Sierra Forest Legacy in this capacity. For the past year and a half or so, you have been recruiting communities within the Sierra Nevada to join the Firewise Communities/USA program in an effort to lower wildfire risk in that region. For purposes of the chat, we will ask our guests to hold questions until the end of the presentation. The chat will then become completely interactive. David, we know you work quite closely with CALFIRE as you take communities through the Firewise Communities/USA process. Would you please describe how that works?

David_Jaramillo Well first I would like to thank you for asking me to be the Firewise Chat guest today. Yes, I have been trying to promote and use the Firewise program for the past year and a half or so and have had a great time. My background as a Registered Professional Forester has helped guide me through the challenging world of fire mitigation in the state of California. Because CalFire is the state liaison for the Firewise program in California as well as the main firefighting force I have had the privilege of building relationships with these folks. We have a great CalFire state Firewise Liaison here in California and he has encouraged Sierra Forest Legacy's effort to help make the Sierra Nevada more Firewise. I guess that for me it has all come down to relationship building and working with fire prevention folks from CalFire as well as other state and

local agencies. Like I said, I have had a great time mostly because I have been able to work with and associate myself with so many great and hard working people.

Judith_Leraas_Cook And how do you interface with California's FireSafe Councils?

David_Jaramillo Well I can't say that I work with all of the very successful Fire Safe Councils (FSC's) in the state, but I have had the great privilege to work with many unique councils. I believe that the Firewise program is just another tool that can help the FSC's spread the fire mitigation message, get communities organized and working together, and gain a sense of pride and community throughout the state. I have had nothing but amazing support from the FSC's that I have been able to work with. Most of the folks that attend FSC meetings want to get communities, natural resources and the vast beauty of, in my case, the Sierra Nevada prepared and protected from catastrophic wildfire. Because of this desire for safety and conservation I believe that my work with the FSC's has been very well accepted. Once again, I have been able to work with some great folks out here and that has been key to my collaboration with the FSC's. I just try to work with everyone and tailor my approach to the needs of their particular area, which in the Sierra Nevada can be very different just on the other side of the bridge or on the next ridge.

Judith_Leraas_Cook How many communities have you guided to Firewise Communities/USA recognition?

David_Jaramillo Well in the first year of my work with Sierra Forest Legacy I was able to guide 4 communities through the program. This doubled the Firewise participation in the state of California. I had a great time working with these communities, all of which were completely different, and have maintained contact with all of them. I have gained many friends through the process and look to many of these folks for guidance as I continue my work here. I have got to say that a couple of these communities were so advanced in their fire mitigation efforts and have become models for me to look at when I talk with new communities.

Judith_Leraas_Cook And how many more communities are you working with that have embarked on the Firewise process?

David_Jaramillo Currently I am working with 3 new communities in the Sierra Nevada and have just hired a bright young forester/firefighter to help spread the work that I have started. Of course I am always trying to lay the seeds for new communities and have some more in the making. I have found that this takes some time. Once again each of the communities is very unique and my approach has reflected the dynamics of each community.

Judith_Leraas_Cook What are the techniques you use to gain the interest of communities in the Sierra Nevada?

David_Jaramillo Well it varies greatly, but for the most part I try to put a conservation and environmental awareness spin on my approach. I have not yet met a person here in the Sierra that does not appreciate the natural splendor of this amazing Range of Light. I try to explain that our homes and communities can pose a great threat to our forests, watersheds, wildlife, and air quality should they ignite as they have on many occasions. So using this approach I can explain that we have a social and environmental responsibility to prepare our homes and communities for wildfire.

Judith_Leraas_Cook What are their most popular projects or events?

David_Jaramillo That's very hard to say. I would have to say that good old fashioned BBQ's, home evaluations and monthly meetings are very popular.

Denise what kind of bbqs? how do they factor in?

David_Jaramillo Everyone loves BBQ's and they are great ways to educate about fire mitigation as well as strengthen the community core. In fact, I will be attending a BBQ/Firewise day in a couple of weeks... I just may bring baby Noah.

Judith_Leraas_Cook We have been delighted to learn that you are now able to add a person to the Sierra Legacy staff who will be similar work to your own. Do you have targets or goals you hope to reach? If so, what are they?

David_Jaramillo Yes, we are very pleased to have a new hire working with the Firewise program for the Sierra Forest Legacy. My goal is to have her spread this work down the range a bit more. For all of you who have spent any amount of time in the Sierra Nevada you realize real quick that it is very time consuming to get around. These are beautiful mountains and hills, but they are very hard to travel in. Because of this travel issue my work has been limited to about 3 counties and my goal is to spread this work down the range. I can't say that I have a target amount of communities that we want to work with, but I can say that I want to provide quality work to each and every community that we work with.

Judith_Leraas_Cook I am curious to know what changes you have observed within your recognized communities as they enter this year's wildfire season.

David_Jaramillo Not many changes other than excitement. These folks work very hard at this and of course every fire season can be exciting out here. I think that many of the folks that I have worked with have much more confidence now that they understand how homes burn down and how to mitigate for this.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Any other thoughts about Firewise Communities/USA that you would like to share?

David_Jaramillo Well, I have met many great people including you Judith and Michelle and I am very thankful for that. I hope to continue working with communities on this very important issue of fire mitigation. I hope that soon we will begin to invest more in fire mitigation measures as apposed to fire suppression efforts in the future. I believe that Firewise Communities/USA is bringing us closer to this reality and I am very excited and thankful to be a part of this movement.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Thank you, David! That was wonderful information. We will post today's transcript in the 'Chat Transcripts' area of the Firewise forum very soon. The chat is now open to everyone. Feel free to ask questions of David, Michele and myself. If you have questions after the chat, you can contact me at firewiseusa@aol.com. I will either respond directly or put you into contact with someone who can provide the information you need.

David_Jaramillo There was a question earlier about BBQ's. Where there is food people will come.

Jeff_Madden Is Sierra Forest Legacy an ngo (Non-government org)? And if yes, how are you funded?

David_Jaramillo Yes, we are a non-profit that is generally grant and foundation funded. We try to do as much good work as we can.

Denise let me rephrase the bbq question...food is a great motivator, but how are these bbqs presented? is it a community event where there will be food s it marketed it s a bbq firt and then you happen to get some info? sorry for the spelling - it is still early out here

David_Jaramillo yes, they are presented as Fire events before BBQ's. generally agency folks try to come and bring equipment to show and tell as well as bring the fire mitigation message closer to home.

Kimm do you have "seasonal" home owners that were reluctant to join the Firewise Program? if so how did you get them on board?

David_Jaramillo The events that i have been to that promote this fire mitigation message have been very well attended and folks leave with alot more than they came in with.

Jeff_Madden How large are these BBQ events? Neighborhood (say 10 - 20 families) or community-sized? Any size that seems to work best?

David_Jaramillo Yes, in the Sierra Nevada there are many seasonal residents and it can be a challenge. We just try to encourage the communities to continue to spread the word in the hopes that others will jump on board.

Kimm sorta like Peer Pressure ;)

Denise how are some of the ways you reach out to the seasonal folks?

David_Jaramillo I have been to events with upwards of 80 folks or so including local, state and elected personel.

Kimm Do any local business' help with accentives? incentives (oops)

David_Jaramillo Many of these communities have mailing lists so they try to contact them that way. Also, many of the communities have monthly and annual meetings and well as newsletters to help folks stay in the loop. Not that I know of. For the most part, it is the key players in the communities that just come together and make these things happen. It is wonderful to watch and be a part of.

Judith_Leraas_Cook David - Thank you for such a wonderful hour! I am particularly interested in your social responsibility approach. That is a door that many of us can use to get interest from communities all over the country. We are coming up on the end of our hour. Do you have any parting thoughts?

David_Jaramillo Yes, we are very fortunate to live in such a beautiful place and have a responsibility to tend to it and protect it for generations to come. I love being a part of this as i have stated and i am glad to be serving in this manner.

Judith_Leraas_Cook Thank you all for joining us today!!

Kimm Thank you David, Judith and Michele

Judith_Leraas_Cook It was a real pleasure to have you here, Kimm.

Kimm:)

Denise aloha all

Judith_Leraas_Cook Aloha, Denise!

David_Jaramillo Thank again for having me and the Sierra Forest Legacy as your chat guest today. Thanks also for all of your encouragement and direction. Your knowledge and vision has been very inspiring for me as i do this work.

Michele_Steinberg This was a great session. Thanks for your insights!

David_Jaramillo Cheers

Judith_Leraas_Cook And, you, David have been an inspiration to us as well. Cheers! Take good care of Noah!

David_Jaramillo I will. Christy and I are very excited for this new chapter in our lives. He is so wonderful. It is great being a new dad.