



COUNTY OF MONTEREY
CAO Weekly Report

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SPECIALREPORT



Paul Guzman (left) and Jim Gruber (right) became unexpected heroes this month, pulling residents of an apartment complex to safety when they spotted flames while monitoring the Pajaro River.

WRA Staffers Go to a Flood, Find a Fire, Save Lives

County Notes

- > Did you know car seat laws in California have changed this year? Find out more [here](#).

It can be a long and nervous night for Water Resources Agency staff who pull overnight river monitoring duty during recent storms. That was the situation recently in Pajaro, but workers assigned to monitor the river there ended up rescuing residents from a fire, not a flood.

On Thursday morning, January 12th, WRA staff including Paul Guzman and Jim Gruber were monitoring the Pajaro River, which had been at high levels due to heavy rains. At 4:00 a.m. they noticed there was indeed a danger, but

not from the river. Smoke was coming from the roof of a building near San Juan Road.

“Jim and I had just pulled up to the Main Street bridge levee access ramp when our co-worker Charles Lingenfelter pointed out the flames,” explains Paul Guzman. “A man at a shop across from the building said he thought people lived there. This spurred Jim and I to run across the street to start evacuations. As we were running across the street, a Watsonville Police Officer arrived on scene and we told him that there were people in the structure.”



The fire as first seen by Paul Guzman and Jim Gruber (above). Firefighting efforts in full swing (below).



Two businesses in a U-shaped complex were ablaze and the fire threatened apartments across the driveway. Even though the fire was moving quickly, Paul and Jim acted as first responders: Paul entered the burning structure alerting and physically removing men, women and children, handing them off to Jim who rushed them out to the street and safety. Also assisted to safety, nine dogs.

But the danger was far from over. Once the first apartments were cleared out, authorities spotted a second apartment complex billowing smoke.

Paul continues the story in his own words:

“Jim, myself and two police officers all ran into this building which was being consumed by smoke and began pounding on doors. There were about 20 doors in an open-air figure eight pattern.

We thought all residents were out of the building but then a man came running up the stairs screaming ‘Brother! Brother! Brother is in his room!’ The officer and I ran back to that room and started pounding and yelling ‘Open up, fire, time to get out!’ When the resident did finally open the door, it was an elderly man. I told him in Spanish that we had to leave immediately as the smoke had become very thick to the point the officer and I were coughing and having a tough time breathing.

I escorted the man down the stairs and across the street. By this time, multiple fire engines had arrived. Later, the man who alerted me to his brother in the building said that the elderly man was deaf and probably had no idea that we were yelling ‘fire.’”

Fire officials blame the blaze on faulty wiring and credit these first witnesses with alerting residents and getting them to safety. Acting WRA Water Maintenance Superintendent Bret Ogden says Guzman and Gruber are downplaying their heroic efforts that night.

“A lot of lives were saved that night thanks to Paul and Jim,” says Ogden. “If you see them around the county, take a moment and thank them for their amazing efforts.”

“Jim and I don’t think of ourselves as heroes,” says Guzman who credits family members who have been everything from fire and policemen to soldiers with teaching him to handle emergency situations with poise and professionalism. “Doing the right thing in emergency situations is just something we do.”

DA Investigator Makes the Grade with FBI

The District Attorney’s Office chief investigator has added the FBI National Academy to his resume.

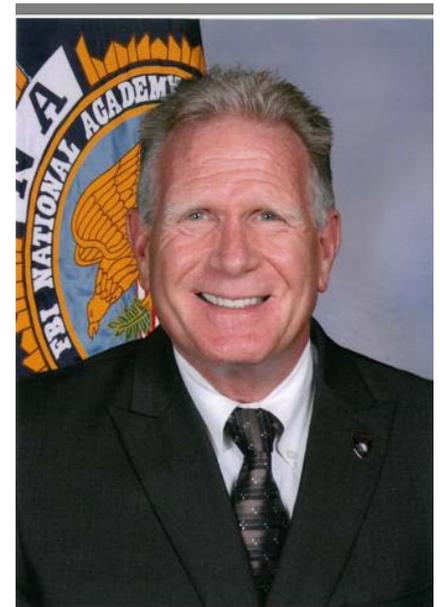
Chief Investigator Gary Craft graduated from the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Virginia last month.

Craft is the first sworn peace officer from the Monterey County District Attorney’s Office to attend this prestigious academy. He took part in an eleven-week advanced executive development training, which included topics such as contemporary issues in law enforcement, psychology of communication, executive leadership and fitness training.

National Academy participants are select officers who have proven records as professionals within their agencies and are considered the top 1% of law enforcement executives.

FBI Director James Comey was the keynote speaker at the graduation ceremony. The session Craft attended, which was the academy’s 266th, included 221 men and women from 48 states and 20 international jurisdictions, five military organizations and eight federal civilian organizations.

Craft has had a 40-year career in law enforcement, the last nine with the District Attorney’s Office. He oversees the DA’s Bureau of Investigations, which includes 37 staff and specialized units such as Major Crimes, Special Investigations, Fraud, Domestic Violence, Gang Crimes, Prison Crimes, Child Abduction and Sexual Assault. This bureau also assists other law enforcement agencies within the county with public corruption investigations, officer-involved shooting and in-custody death cases.



Gary Craft.

RMA Public Works Projects Recognized

Monterey County Resource Management Agency-Public Works staff received two awards this week from the Monterey Bay Chapter of the American Public Works Association.

Two county projects earned honors among six awards given by the Association at its annual meeting and awards ceremony on January 25th in Hollister. RMA-Public Works received an Award of Merit for Project of the Year for its Moss Landing Otter Crossing Project and the Chualar School Field/Sidewalk renovation project.



Crews at work on the Otter Crossing while a 'client' observes.

Operations Manager Shawn Atkins and Engineering Technician Brenda Villanueva accepted the APWA award for the Moss Landing Sea Otter Crossing Project. This project included the installation of warning signs for Sea Otters crossing Moss Landing Road, improvements to the berm of Moss Landing Road and a small overlay. A removable rubberized speed table complete with a crosswalk for pedestrians in the area between Moss Landing shops and campgrounds to the Whole Enchilada Restaurant and other businesses was also installed. Construction was done by Monterey County Public Works crews from District 1 and the total cost was under \$10,000.

Management Analyst II Olga Carranza and Management Specialist Juan Mesa accepted the award for the Chualar School Field/Sidewalk Renovation Project. This two-phase project included the construction of Americans with Disability Act (ADA) compliant sidewalks on the streets closest to Chualar Elementary school and correcting drainage issues at the existing school field, removing the existing sod and replacing it with synthetic turf. Costs for the first phase totaled \$244,533 and \$857,511 for the second phase.



The Chualar School project included renovating the field (left) and building ADA-compliant sidewalks nearby (right).

