

Ravaging Wildfires Unite Western States Horse Expo Community

There are few things more terrifying than a roaring, voracious wildfire that consumes everything in its course. Recent headlines told of the horror of California wildfires that destroyed entire towns, taking lives of humans and animals in their paths. These fires were the worst in California history, totaling over 8,000 fires that consumed 1.139 million acres.

News on the television focused on the Northern California fires in the Santa Rosa area, interviewing people who had lost everything to the flames and had nowhere to go. Other interviews showed people desperately trying to load horses, goats, sheep into trailers — some were the owners, others were good samaritans trying their best to help. Those were the lucky animals; many had to be left behind. And then the questions arose: Where was a safe place to take these animals? Can we come back for another load before the roads closed? How are these animals going to be contained and fed? Who's going to help?

One person who simply couldn't watch the television news without taking action was Marcy Goodman, Project Manager for Western States Horse Expo. Even though the major fires were hundreds of miles away, Marcy knew she had to do something, and do it quickly. Miki Nelsen, owner of Western States Horse Expo, gathered the staff for ideas and immediately put out an email blast to the Horse Expo community, asking for help for the fire victims and their animals. But she wasn't looking for money — she was asking people to “circle the wagons” and load their trailers, trucks and cars with horse feed, pipe panels, hay, t-posts, fencing wire — everything needed for displaced animals. Two local retailers, Douglas Feed in Granite Bay and Lee's Feed in Shingle Springs, stepped up to the plate by offering a significant discount rate for people who were taking supplies to the fires. These retailers were amazed by the amount of donations from those who couldn't travel but wanted to help. “I was overwhelmed by the generosity of people from across the country. They donated tens of thousands of dollars directly to the participating feed stores for this mission,” says Miki. “Those funds helped pile up needed supplies onto a cavalcade of trailers and trucks. And I cannot emphasize how proud I am of my staff and their willingness to

take action and get into the trenches. I'm also deeply humbled to see that people trusted Western States Horse Expo without question.”

Local retailers weren't the only ones who reached out to help. Mary's Tack and Feed from Del Mar in Southern California shipped items to the Western States Horse Expo office for fire victims. Cavallo Horse and Rider shipped a huge amount of new halters from Canada. Masterson Equine Services in Idaho called in a large cash donation to Douglas Feed so trucks could be loaded with supplies. “I must add that a significant number of people who chose to be anonymous sent donations so we could pick up necessary items,” says Marcy. “The horse community really rallied to help.” Those who showed up with trucks and trailers included trainer Isidro Espinoza from Loomis, who, along with his wife Amber, organized the loading of supplies and headed the truck caravan to the fire victims.

Even RAM Trucks reached out. The corporate office created a stunning advertisement asking the “good people of the Ram Nation” to help the fire victim horses and people — whether still evacuated or returned home. The ad directed people to the Horse Expo office so they could be a part of this incredible effort. This community outreach spanned from individuals to local and national retailers to a huge corporation. It shows how much horse people care about each other...

When Miki put out the email blast to Horse Expo attendees, her intention was to gather folks and travel in a caravan to the Santa Rosa area, where the horrifying wildfires literally flattened a major part of the town. But those plans changed with one phone call.

“I answered the phone, hoping it was another volunteer,” remembers Marcy. “But it was a woman from the Redwood fire area in Mendocino County. She was crying, saying that all the news headlines and television features were about the Santa Rosa fires, and that the horse people in Mendocino were desperate for help. So plans changed in that moment, and our caravan of trucks, trailers and cars headed for Mendocino and the Sonoma and Ukiah fairgrounds. When our ‘horse supply brigade’ arrived, we were welcomed with open arms. It was so apparent that they needed exactly what we had brought and we made sure it got into the right hands. To say it was a heartwarming moment is an understatement.”

Horse people are unique in that they not only have an interest in common, they share a lifestyle and mutual bond that's almost invincible. That was apparent when people who were simply on a Western States Horse Expo email database responded with such determination and generosity to help fellow horse people in need.

The Western States Horse Expo holds two events each year. Horse Expo Pomona (www.horseexpoevents.com) will be held March 9-11, 2018 and the Sacramento event (www.horseexpo.com) will be held June 8-10. Come see what unites these loyal attendees every year! It's truly a huge community with a common bond. For more information call 800.352.2411 or email letters@horseexpo.com.

EDITORS: PHOTOS AVAILABLE. Email irishkate@prodigy.net.

About Western States Horse Expo: The Sacramento location for the Western States Horse Expo will celebrate its 20th anniversary June 8-10, 2018 and the Western States Horse Expo Pomona, California will celebrate its seventh year in 2018. Pomona dates are March 9-11, 2018. Founded by horsewoman and entrepreneur Miki Nelsen, the Western States Horse Expos are the largest equine expositions in the United States.