

## Volunteer fire force for Uvas Canyon

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Sometimes something good can be the result of a disaster: the families in the Uvas/Croy community that suffered through last September's devastating fire are taking that message to heart, announcing on the first anniversary of the fire the formation of the Uvas Volunteer Fire Department.

Nik Gluck, who will act as chief of the department and president of the corporation, said the Croy fire was the spark that ignited what had been a vague idea.

"We had kind of had concerns in the past, because we are somewhat rural and it takes a good bit of time for someone to get out here," he said Wednesday. "The Croy fire kind of nailed it for us, made us think maybe we should do this. The core members of our team were definitely affected. It's kind of the feeling that if it happened once, it could happen again."

The volunteer force already has two fire engines.

Gluck spent some of his own money - \$4,000 - to purchase a 1969 fire engine on eBay.

The department's other engine came from the Casa Loma Volunteer Fire Department, for \$1,500. One engine will be parked at Gluck's house in Little Uvas and one at Weeks' on Croy Road until the department finds a permanent home.

"We're looking at maybe getting a 50- or 100-year lease on some property, but nothing is for sure yet," he said.

The Croy fire in the hills west of Morgan Hill started Sept. 23, 2002, and burned 3,127 acres. A total of 34 homes were lost, six were damaged and more than 65 were saved.

At the peak of the battle, 2,102 firefighters were on the lines. More than \$8 million was spent fighting the fire, which investigators believe was started by faulty solar panels in an unpermitted solar system atop the 7900 block of Croy Road. Only 11 minor injuries were reported.

The fire, the largest in the area in 17 years, was declared out Sept. 29.

Gluck said the ceremony on Sunday will feature several speakers, including County Supervisor Don Gage and Dave Athey and Chris Morgan with the California Department of Forestry. The CDF Fire officials will talk about safety and fire prevention, said Gluck, and Pat Congdon with the Open Space Authority will also address the gathering.

The public is invited to attend the 2 p.m. event. It will be held in the Croy Canyon, approximately four miles down Croy Road just before Uvas Canyon County Park. For specifics, check the Uvas Volunteer Fire Department's new website, [uvasfire.org](http://uvasfire.org) or call 1-800-505-4040.

The new fire department already has 25 volunteers on the roster, Gluck said, including Kenn Weeks, who will act as vice president of the non-profit corporation and deputy chief of the department.

“I think that’s a good number, but, of course, recruiting is ongoing,” Gluck said.

Gluck said the volunteers were recruited in several ways, some from conversations among neighbors, some from flyers, and some decided to join in after Gluck and others went knocking on doors to find people who were interested.

The fledgling department has received help from more established groups. The Casa Loma Volunteer force, also in the Santa Cruz Mountains, has been working with the recruits, and has donated many “hand-me-downs,” said Gluck, including tools, suits and other items.

“We have a little bit of everything now,” he said. “Many of the things came from Casa Loma, some were purchased by residents with their own money.”

The Casa Loma Volunteer Fire Association has been protecting the residents of Casa Loma and Loma Chiquita roads and the surrounding communities of Loma Prieta, Summit/Mt. Madonna, Twin Falls, Casa Loma/McKean and portions of Croy Road for 20 years. CLVFA has an upper and a lower station in the unincorporated backcountry of Santa Clara County, near the McKean/Uvas road intersection.

Gluck was just winding up the legal formalities involved in creating the corporation and the department at the end of the week.

“Everything should be in place by the weekend,” he said.

The main benefit of the department in case of a fire, Gluck said, would be what firefighters refer to as “initial attack.”

“It can make a world of difference in fighting a fire,” he said. “It normally takes approximately 20 minutes for crews to get up here. We can cut that time in half, at least, which will be a big advantage.”

The other bonus to the community from the department, he said, is quicker response to medical emergencies. Although the department does not have any EMT’s, or emergency medical technicians, Gluck said he hopes some of the volunteers will train for certification. But the volunteers able to provide “first responder” assistance, including CPR, which, like the initial attack in firefighting, can greatly increase a patient’s chances for survival.

Volunteer fire department websites: [www.uvasfire.org](http://www.uvasfire.org), [www.clvfa.org](http://www.clvfa.org) and [www.perfectsites.com/SRA/fire.html](http://www.perfectsites.com/SRA/fire.html) for the Ormsby Fire Brigade.

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**Kenn Weeks of the Uvas Volunteer Fire Department says about 90 people were at this event. "Six new recruits signed up to join UVFD for a total roster of 34 at this time!" Members of the Santa Clara County FireSafe Council, including Dave Athey, the Acting Operations Chief for the South Bay Division of the CDF, are supporting the Uvas Volunteer Fire Department and helping them to get started. Kenn and Nik Gluck are also affiliated with the Santa Clara County FireSafe Council.**