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## Hemphill: Recognizing kindness and heroism

The fires were devastating to some, the evacuations disrupted many, but the stories of kindness and heroism just go on forever. San Diego County rose to the occasion in many ways – but if I don't tell you what I know, those stories will never be chronicled.

When my wife and I, along with our cat, evacuated north, we took two cars and met at a coffee shop in Temecula to make our plans. Jean was on her cell phone to her family in New England, assuring them that we were fine. A woman overheard her conversation and, apologizing for eavesdropping, offered us a place in her large home. She was delightful, and insistent, but we were going to Hemet and we had a friend who would find us a hotel or motel. Her generosity will always be remembered. Hers was not a token offer but a heartfelt attempt to help a displaced family.

As a Realtor, I was responsible for several vacant homes, and one of them was in the path of destruction in north Poway. Google showed that the home survived the fire, but other very expensive homes on the same block were destroyed. When I got to the home, the fire had obviously burned the landscaping right up to my client's home.

My clients are Europeans who bought their home last year, and they have yet to occupy it. The home next door was burned to the ground. Since I had previously met that family, I went to express my sympathy at their loss. I found out that they had awakened at 4 a.m. to the raging fire. These neighbors then fought the fire at their home with garden hoses, but it soon became obvious that they could not save their home.

Rather than abandoning their efforts, and even with no firefighters in the neighborhood, they used the garden hoses at my clients' home to stop the landscaping fire from destroying that home.

Not satisfied with saving my clients' home, the six members of the family went to one more home, already on fire, and saved that home as well. Two more multi-million dollar homes further toward the wildland interface were too far gone, and were lost.

Overwhelmed by the fires around the county, the firefighters apparently never made it to this neighborhood – but two homes were saved by a family who had already lost their own home.

People rose to the occasion and behaved well. Yes, there were bureaucratic messes that should have been corrected after the fires of 2003, but we can expect politicians and bureaucrats to mess up. We elect people to office on persona, not on competence. We cannot expect them to appoint bureaucrats on the basis of competence, and politicians do not disappoint those of us who observe them. It is apparent that in spite of huge advances in communication cooperation, CalFire again provided too little in air assets

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(particularly military), too late.

But for now, the heroism of the on-the-scene firefighters, and individual people, needs to be honored. The kindness of strangers needs to be recognized. Blame can wait a week or so, but "get a rope..."

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