

2 years after Tubbs: Where does Sonoma County fire recovery stand? October 4 event to give detailed updates

The North Bay Business Journal

Two years after wildfires leveled thousands of homes, area leaders will stop and assess where area is and where it has yet to go in recovery on Oct. 4.

Keynoted by State Senator Mike McGuire, D-Healdsburg, “Impact Sonoma Two Years On” will draw together government, business and relief organizations for a post-fire report card. The event takes place from 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Friday, Oct. 4 at the Hyatt Regency Sonoma Wine Country.

McGuire, a former Sonoma County supervisor, won his second senate term in the Senate last November and was named assistant majority leader.

“The size and scope of wildland fires in California are getting worse,” McGuire told the Press Democrat in September, 2018, less than year after strong winds carried the Tubbs fire from Napa into Sonoma County before reaching parts of eastern Santa Rosa, killing 22 people and destroying thousands of homes. Two months later, in November 2018, the Camp Fire — with 85 fatalities and 18,800 homes lost -- became the state’s most destructive blaze.

Another conference speaker, Jeff Okrepkie, lost his home in the 2017 Tubbs fire as it swept through the Santa Rosa neighborhood of Coffey Park. He later founded Coffey Strong, as residents banded together to rebuild.

Impact Sonoma also features leaders of two key government agencies at the forefront of recovery. Tom Schwedhelm, mayor of Santa Rosa – hardest hit of all Sonoma County communities in October, 2017 – will join chairman of the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, David Rabbitt at the event.

As the area’s construction industry focuses on rebuilding homes lost, as well deal with accelerated efforts to build more affordable housing, an update on that industry will be delivered at the event by Doug Hamilton, president of the North Coast Builders Exchange.

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Two other speakers on Oct. 4 are familiar with insurance and the outpouring of effort to help the overall area recovery.

Amy Bach is executive director of United Policyholders, a nonprofit created in 1991 to be “an effective voice for consumers of all types” when it comes to insurance. Bach’s group worked extensively with area victims of the 2017 wildfires.

Joining her in reporting on rebuilding in the fires’ aftermath will be Jennifer Gray Thompson, executive director of the Rebuild North Bay Foundation, created just days after the 2017 fire.

Joining government, business and nonprofit leaders, the organization continues to guide the community response and renewal efforts. Its fundraising efforts alone gathered and distributed more than \$30 million in aid.

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