

Del Walters, Director of CAL FIRE

Del Walters was appointed as Director of CAL FIRE on February 11, 2009.

When Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger appointed Del Walters as director of CAL FIRE, his selection was historic. Walters is only the second director to have ever worked through the ranks of CAL FIRE starting as a seasonal firefighter.

"With more than 30 years of service at CAL FIRE, Del Walters is the perfect person to head our state's firefighting efforts," said Governor Schwarzenegger. "Playing a key role in combating the 2007 and 2008 firestorms, he has the experience and leadership capabilities to implement the highest standards of fire prevention and fire fighting while ensuring all Californians are protected."

Walters' promotion to the department's highest rank comes after more than 30 years since beginning his career with CAL FIRE as a firefighter I stationed at King City in the San Benito-Monterey Unit.

Walters has served as the executive officer for CAL FIRE since 2008. Prior to promoting to executive officer, he was the assistant region chief then staff chief of operations for the Northern Region.

Prior to that, Walters was the deputy chief for the Shasta-Trinity Unit. He previously worked in the Sonoma-Lake-Napa Unit as the assistant chief of administration, battalion chief, vegetation management program coordinator forester I and fire captain. He has also served as a fire captain, fire apparatus engineer and firefighter in the San Benito-Monterey

Unit. Walters has been a California State Peace Officer since 1986.

After starting his education at Hartnell University in Salinas, Walters received his Bachelor of Science degree in forest resource management from Humboldt State University.

As the first month passes on his directorship, Walters plans to keep the department moving forward in the same positive direction. "I do not intend to make dramatic changes in the direction we have benefited from during Chief Grijalva's tenure," said Walters.

As Walters' reflects on his career with CAL FIRE he has a number of accomplishments. After living in Santa Rosa for 18 years, Walters has many stories that have come out of his time in Sonoma County. In a county that has a long history dealing with major flooding issues, Chief Walters lead a small team of Emergency personnel who created the Lower Russian River Flood Response Plan with the Sonoma County Sheriff's Office and several Fire Protection Districts. The plan addressed ways to help minimize the impact from flooding and centered on how public safety departments would respond. The plan remains in use today in the areas along the river that are prone to severe flooding.

When it comes to managing major incident, Chief Walters has had his share of experiences. His leadership in the recent

fire sieges has come from his time as Incident Commander of CAL FIRE Incident Command Team #3. Walter's had the opportunity to showcase the department's expertise in incident management and dealing with complex incidents when his team was called upon to help manage the Exotic Newcastle Disease. "Had you told me earlier in my career that I'd be the incident commander on a team responsible for chicken disease fighting, I might have thought you were joking," Walters added with a laugh.

Though dedicated to his job and the department, Walters enjoys spending quality time with his family. Walters lives in Redding with his wife of over 30 years, Janet. The pair has two children; a son David, 26, and daughter Shannon, 24, both of whom live in Santa Rosa. When Walters is not at work he enjoys the outdoors, especially hunting pheasants with his dog, Otter.

"I'm optimistic about the direction CAL FIRE is headed," said Walters. "Throughout my career I have heard the sentiment that it would be great to have a director that worked their way through the ranks... someone who knew the department. I can't claim to have done it all, but this is my opportunity to use my knowledge and skills to build on the future of this department. I look forward to sharing the experience with the department."



Secretary for Natural Resources, Mike Chrisman swears in Chief Del Walters as CAL FIRE's new Director.

Janet Upton, Deputy Director of Communications

Janet Upton was appointed as deputy director of communications on July 1, 2008. The Communiqué caught up with Upton to learn more about her.

Tell us about your career with CAL FIRE:

When I was in college I had every intention of becoming a school teacher like my parents. I was taking an EMT class where I was recruited by a then Sonoma Unit CDF captain. I began my fire service career as a firefighter I at the Hilton Fire Station in 1986.

I thought CAL FIRE would be a great job to help me pay for college. After I did my student teaching and earned my degree, I enjoyed working for CAL FIRE so much that I chose it as my career instead of becoming a school teacher.

A few of my favorite assignments included being a firefighter, rescue diver, working in the command center and prevention bureau and being on Command Team #5, which I especially enjoyed. The varied experiences have been helpful in my role as PIO and I have had the good fortune to work for some of the greatest leaders in our department along the way.

Which of your accomplishments are you most proud of?

I think being able to help people in their time of need is what keeps a lot of us in this field motivated so I am really proud to be part of this noble profession.

Another high point in my career has been the Fire PALS (Fire Prevention and Life Safety) program we were able to start in the Butte Unit. The group consists of firefighters, prevention and personnel specialists, engineers, captains, VIP's and a battalion chief.

Fire PALS teaches children fire and life safety messages using music, comedy and characterization. You would be amazed at the talent in our department! One example of the assembly venue program is our "American Safety Idol" skit that parodies the popular television show and highlights helmet safety, match and lighter safety, even defensible space.

The Fire PALS program has been attributed for saving at least three children's lives that we know of and it's extremely rewarding to know our efforts have resulted in some happy endings.

What do you envision for the future of CAL FIRE public information?

I think we need to reach out to our customers via what was once considered non-traditional media that is now mainstream. For example, we recently started a department You Tube site called "CAL FIRE TV" where we highlight various programs by posting what are



essentially our own news stories. We plan on starting official department "My Space" and "Facebook" sites and are pursuing other methods of information dissemination like Twitter and a CAL FIRE blog.

I am also working on the implementation of PIO "quick attack" teams whose mission is to respond to large, complex incidents in support of the Unit/Incident PIO during the ramp up phase of emergencies. This is typically when many "figurative fires" can conflagrate into negative media stories and negative public perception simply due to a lack of PIO's to address them. This concept was tested on the "Tea" and "Freeway" fires this past fall with great success.

What would you like to accomplish during your time as Deputy Director?

I would like to see the dedicated Unit PIO positions become more widely implemented. I know this comes at a cost but the benefit of having positions like this, with the right people in them, is immeasurable in terms of media and public relations. I strongly believe that the payoff of having the continuity and established relationships that the dedicated PIO positions foster far outweighs the investment, though it's admittedly difficult to quantify in terms of dollars.