



CIRCLE V RANCH CAMP & RETREAT CENTER

EST. 1945



NEWS

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Circle V Ranch Camp Status Post Whittier Fire—Statement from David Fields Thanking First Responders Who Kept 88 Campers & 36 Staff Safe on 7/8/17

Santa Barbara County, California—PUBLIC STATEMENT—

My name is David Fields, Executive Director of St. Vincent de Paul of Los Angeles. Since 1908, our non-profit charity has been providing aid to the hungry, homeless and working poor regardless of race, origin, religion or gender in LA, Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. Our crown jewel is the St. Vincent de Paul Circle V Ranch Camp, founded in 1945, and located on 30 acres in the Los Padres National Forest across from Cachuma Lake in Santa Barbara County since 1990 on land we lease from the US Forest Service. On Saturday, July 8, 2017, it was the fourth day of Circle V Ranch Camp's Session Two Holiday Week, with fun activities and fellowship for 88 campers ranging in age from 7 to 16 coordinated and cared for by 36 staff and counselors on-site—all CPR and First-Aid certified and trained. Circle V Ranch Camp is accredited by the American Camp Association; it's the only national association that accredits all types of camps, based upon 290 national standards for health and safety.

At approximately 1:40 pm the Camp Director and senior staff saw smoke from the Cachuma Lake area and immediately drove down the 1.5 mile forest road to investigate. First responders at our entrance near Hwy 154 told them to go back and evacuate Circle V. They immediately implemented the emergency evacuation procedures. All 124 people (88 campers and 36 staff) were accounted for and ready to evacuate in staff vehicles as instructed by first responders. As the road became difficult to travel due to the fire, 30 campers and 12 adult staff members were able to make it safely to the evacuation point. The remaining 58 campers and 24 adult staff members were instructed by lead staff to turn around and "shelter in place" and they did so inside the Dining Lodge in the main area of Camp. Camp staff and counselors kept campers calm by singing camp songs, playing games and watching a movie.

There were 58 campers and 24 adult staff members awaiting rescue at this point. Staff was instructed by US Forest Service Officer Dave Dahlberg and Dozer Operator Mark Linane, who reached them first, to hose down the Dining Lodge building and shelter inside and be ready to act. All 82 people were ready to go when Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Search & Rescue Squad arrived, loaded everyone into their vehicles and reached the evacuation point at Hwy 154 by approximately 5:40pm. We thank the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians for sending two of their busses to meet evacuees there and take everyone to safety.

As per our emergency evacuation procedure, we went to the Old Mission Santa Ines Parish Hall in Solvang where everyone was able to gather together with Camp and St. Vincent de Paul volunteers who provided pizza, water, games, movies and fellowship for the campers and staff. Parents and guardians were notified that they could pick up their children at the Mission in Solvang or, via our chartered busses that took them to their regular pick-up points in Ventura and Los Angeles counties.

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The Circle V staff and counselors performed professionally, compassionately and calmly throughout this entire experience. We are so proud of how they cared for everyone and made sure they were safe. My executive staff and I were able to greet the returning children and their families when they arrived back in LA by 10:30pm. All campers were reunited with their families by 11:15pm Saturday night.

We are so grateful to everyone who worked tirelessly together to get everyone out safely on Saturday. Thank you so much, to so many, including the US Forest Service, Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office, Fire Department, Search & Rescue, Old Mission Santa Ines and countless volunteers who shared their experience and strength and hope.

Everyone is safe! That is such a blessing! Yes, we did lose our Craft Shack Cabin and our Health Office Cabin in the fire. Our water treatment facility and pipes are seriously damaged requiring months of repairs, so we had to cancel the remaining sessions of our 2017 Circle V summer camp. We will rebuild and welcome donations to help with this effort. On behalf of all us at St. Vincent de Paul and our beautiful Circle V Ranch Camp, thank you and God bless.

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More About St. Vincent de Paul Circle V Ranch Camp

Circle V Ranch Camp & Retreat Center was founded in 1945 by St. Vincent de Paul of Los Angeles and has been located on its current site on 30 acres in the Los Padres National Forest in Santa Barbara County since 1990. Each Circle V Ranch Camp session is six days and five nights of traditional supervised summer fun for boys and girls ages 7 to 13 and campers in leadership training from ages 14-17. Campers enjoy activities including archery, arts & crafts, hiking, swimming in the pool, learning about nature, reading skills, painting, photography, playing baseball, basketball, ping pong, foosball, soccer, miniature golf and of course, campfires, skits and singing. There is no TV, radio or internet access to affect the experience. Campers stay in wood cabins or traditional canvas tents. Three nutritious daily meals served family-style in the Dining Lodge are not only for food but also for camaraderie and fellowship.

The Circle V Ranch Camp fee for six days/ five nights including lodging, all meals, activities, recreation and supervised fun is \$450 per child. "Camperships" (scholarship funds made by individuals and groups' donations) are available for qualified campers. In summer 2016, the camp hosted more than 1,000 children for this time-honored experience. During autumn, winter and spring, Circle V is available for rental to other non-profit groups and organizations. For more information, visit www.CircleVRanchCamp.org

Donations to help rebuild the camp and provide "camperships" for future summer sessions can be made online at <https://svdpla.org/donate/>