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CONTACT: Ruthie Retana
(562) 463-3145

Rio Hondo College Roadrunners Fire Crew Joins Battle against Ferguson Fire

WHITTIER – Rio Hondo College’s Roadrunner Crew 77 has been called up for the second time this summer – this time to assist crews battling the massive Ferguson Fire that is threatening Yosemite National Park.

The crew, led by a U.S. Forest Service crew boss, includes 17 recent graduates of the College’s Wildland Fire Academy. A Type II hand crew, the team assists with all aspects of fire monitoring, suppression and control, including digging fire containment lines.

“We are extremely proud of the contributions of our Wildland Fire Academy crew,” Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said. “They represent the best of Rio Hondo College – students and graduates who are dedicating their careers to helping their communities.”

The crew can be called up for 21 days with each activation. It was activated over the July 4 weekend to assist in battling the Agua Caliente fire in Palm Springs.

This call-up started on July 26 when the crew was activated to cover parts of the Angeles National Forest for crews shifting to fight the Ferguson Fire and other blazes. During the first days of that activation, the Roadrunners helped quash a brushfire. On Aug. 2, the team joined the battle against the Ferguson Fire.

Each crew member has met or exceeded U.S. Forest Service requirements for seasonal wildland firefighters. Students also must pass an arduous physical fitness regime. Rio Hondo College has fielded the crew since 2002.

"The Angeles National Forest fire chief and his staff are huge supporters of this program where we train students from a diverse group of people to become firefighters," said Tracy Rickman, coordinator of the Fire Technology programs at Rio Hondo College.

MORE

Rio Hondo College, located in Whittier, California, is committed to the success of its diverse students and communities by providing dynamic educational opportunities and resources that lead to degrees, certificates, transfer, career and technical pathways, basic skills proficiency, and lifelong learning. For information on the College or its programs, please call 562-692-0921 or visit www.riohondo.edu.

Lead Instructor Ryan Carey, also a wildland fire fighter prior to joining Rio Hondo College's faculty, said the young men and women earn the job – nothing is given.

"You have to want to be gone from family and friends for up to 21 days at a time and sleep under the stars and work hard for a 12-hour operational period putting out a fire," Carey said. "It's not for everyone."

The Ferguson Fire has burned more than 91,000 acres since July 13; it is less than 45 percent contained. More than 2,300 firefighters are engaged. There have been two fatalities, including Arrowhead Interagency Hotshots Capt. Brian Hughes, 33.

Board of Trustees President Madeline Shapiro said the entire Rio Hondo College community supports the firefighters who represent them.

"They walk an incredibly difficult path for all of the best reasons," Shapiro said. "It moves all of us to see their dedication as they bravely step into danger to protect our California communities."

PHOTOS

RHC_CREW_1: Rio Hondo College's Roadrunners Crew 77 combats the Agua Caliente Fire in Palm Springs in July. The group has been called up to fight the Ferguson Fire in Northern California. Photo courtesy of Carlos Flores.

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