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Rio Hondo College Sends 40 Firefighters to Battle Wildfires

WHITTIER – Sixteen cadets from the Rio Hondo College Wildfire Academy are helping to battle the Creek Fire and 24 former graduates have joined efforts this week to quell the massive Thomas Fire burning near Santa Barbara.

The firefighters were activated on Monday. Crew 77, known as the Roadrunners, was previously activated on Dec. 5 to work the Creek Fire near Sylmar. The new tour will run about two weeks.

The 24 firefighters assigned to the Thomas Fire include Rio Hondo College Wildland Fire Academy graduates who worked the fire season in Oregon, California and Washington, and a group of firefighters who graduated from the Rio Hondo College Fire Academy in November.

“We are sending as many as we can due to the devastating nature of this fire,” said Crew 77 Chief Tracy E. Rickman, who is the College’s EMT, wildland, fire and homeland security coordinator. “Everyone knows they will miss the holidays, but they all wanted to go and help out.”

The crew assists with all aspects of fire monitoring, suppression and control. In summer, the crew was activated to support U.S. Forest Service crews. In 2016, the crew was called up three times to aid the Forest Service.

Some crew members left other jobs to join the effort.

Rio Hondo College’s Wildland Fire Academy is highly regarded within the industry, with 100 percent of graduates finding positions with wildland fire agencies.

“Our fire academy crews and graduates are true community servants, and we could not be prouder of them,” Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss said. “Their dedication to their craft and to the State of California is a testimonial to the lessons of compassion and commitment they learn at the Rio Hondo College Fire Academy.”

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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.