The mission of Big Sur Fire is to serve and protect the community all while operating as a nonprofit volunteer organization. But what does that really mean for all the people involved in helping BSF achieve their goals? It means hours of training, being available and participating in hundreds of emergency calls, or serving on committees, advisory boards, the Board of Directors, supporting fund raising and community events, all to ensure our organization meets or exceeds our high standards of service and performance. It takes a community of motivated and talented individuals to volunteer and support this dedicated team, which is Big Sur Fire. Everyone working together for the best outcome for the community. And what a privilege it is to be a part of it.

As our firefighters are out there facing the challenge to be the best they can be for their community, the members of the Board seek the best way to support them. I am more than heartened by the level of care, commitment and determination I see in my fellow board members. We are thankful and humbled to follow in the footsteps of those who have served before us.

This year, through a collaborative leadership structure, we have implemented some exciting new programs including a professional development tuition reimbursement and a Health and Wellness program. We have their backs as they dedicate themselves to the mission.

Pressure continues to grow on non-profit, volunteer service providers like Big Sur Fire, as regulations and technical requirements continue to increase, making the tasks of our team just that much more challenging. Our years of operations have borne out that a non-profit service, enhanced now by the shared leadership management model, is still our best option to achieve our goals. Through teamwork, trust and clear communication we are confident this will help guide us into the future.

The dedication of the Big Sur Fire membership to protecting and serving Big Sur will be there, as long as we have YOU.

From all of us at Big Sur Fire, to all of you, as we enter our 48th year, it is an honor to serve.

Barbara Sexton
Board Chair
Meet Our Firefighters

Martin Palafox, Jr.
Joined the brigade in 2011

Where were you born and how long have you lived in Big Sur?
My twin brother and I were born in Modesto, but I've lived in Big Sur since I was about a month old. My twin, Alberto, was also on the brigade a few years back.

How did you discover your love of firefighting and emergency response?
I realized I wanted to be involved in firefighting during the Basin Complex Fire. When we were evacuated, I really wanted to stay in Big Sur with my dad, but he wanted me to get out with my mom and siblings. I was only a junior in high school at the time. When I got the opportunity to join a few years later, I did just that.

What do you do as a career outside of BSF?
I have worked at Post Ranch for many years and have gained my hospitality experience and knowledge through various positions there. I've had many titles, but am currently the Operations Manager.

What does your role in BSF entail?
I am a firefighter on the Station 1 crew and most recently, I've been training to become a duty officer. My firefighters endorsement allows me to drive and operate all of our engines and in the past I have been involved in helping with mechanical issues on our apparatus.

What about BSF do you enjoy the most?
Being with Big Sur Fire allows me to bond with the community, whether at events, out on a call, or at training with the other firefighters. I also like attending trainings because they bring us together and there's a sense of camaraderie. During my time with BSF, I have learned a lot and have been able to use so much of it in my day to day life.

How does it feel responding to emergency calls right here in your own community?
It can be difficult knowing that a call could involve my family or loved one. Regardless, you respond and do everything you can to make sure that you have the best outcome possible. It feels good to help my community in that way.

Of all the calls you have responded to in the past year, is there one that stands out to you as most significant?
During a duty officer training, I was Incident Command for the first time ever to the Vista Fire, a vegetation fire that started south of Partington. I was able to run the call under Captain Kropp’s guidance while he was able to be on the front line, fighting the fire.

Was there any particular part of your training that prepared you for that call?
Trainings are important, but I would say past experience from responding to similar calls really helped me understand the Incident Command System that we use to run the calls. It’s pretty much the foundation for operating emergency responses.

If you had one message to the Big Sur community and its visitors, what would it be?
To our community, thank you for all the love and support you continue to give Big Sur Fire!

For the visitors, I'd ask that before visiting, do your research so you understand your destination. Big Sur is unique and isn’t a typical city. Planning ahead will ensure a better Big Sur experience.

What are some of the challenges facing Big Sur Fire today?
We have an increased demand for our services due in part to an influx in tourism and sometimes there aren’t enough responders to handle the volume of calls. On busy weekends, we might get three calls back to back and it’s stressful. It’s also difficult having a full time job and having to make the decision in the moment if I can leave my job to respond to an emergency or if work has to be the priority.

Can you recall a funny moment during a call or training?
When my twin brother Alberto was on the brigade, we would mess with people because we looked so identical. When we would respond together, it would confuse not only the other responders, but the people we were responding to. People would do double takes all the time.
Meet Our Firefighters

Lyle Southall
Joined the brigade in 2018

How did you discover your love of firefighting/emergency response?
As a Big Sur native, I wanted to give back to my community and thought joining Big Sur Fire would be a good way to serve. After I started, I became much more passionate about the organization and the work we do for the community. I appreciate and grow from all the training, and really enjoy the response team comradery. Everyone is encouraging and supportive of everyone else.

What did you/what have you done as a career outside of Big Sur Fire?
I started working as a server and barista in local restaurants and transitioned to carpentry. I like working with my hands and take pride in the finished product at the end of the day or the end of a large project. I have always liked creating and that has transferred to all aspects of my life. Firefighting and BSF has added a new dimension to that.

What does your role in BSF entail and what do you enjoy most about it?
I am an Engineer for Engine 7831 which is stationed on the north coast. I am also on the rescue team. I like all the calls, but I love the cliff rescues most. It’s exciting being a part of a team that works so well together repelling down cliffs and rescuing people.

Have you been out on a major fire?
The Dolan fire was the largest incident I’ve been involved in, but most recently was the Lucia Lodge Fire. Even though they are two very different types of fires, both were an incredible experience. Even though we train for structure fires, the Lucia Lodge was the first one I have responded to in the 3 years I have been a firefighter. All in all, we were prepared to fight the fire and did everything in our power to save what we could.

How did it feel fighting those fires right here in our community?
When responding to a call, you really don’t know or understand exactly what is going on until you get there. Adrenaline is flowing and there is an anxiousness because of the unknown. It feels good to be there on the front line and making a difference. Knowing I’m helping the community is why I do what I do.

Is there any particular part of your training that really helped you during those incidents?
All training is important and relative to what we do whether we’re on a fire, medical emergency or rescue. Structure fires are few and far between, but if we didn’t train for them regularly we wouldn’t have been prepared for the Lucia Fire. To me, continually training is important because once we are on the front line of a fire, we know instinctively what to do. That is so crucial during major fire incidents.

If you had one wish for BSF, what would it be?
BSF provides an extremely valuable service to the community. It has been around for 47 years and has not only saved many lives but preserved thousands of acres of our beautiful forests. I hope Big Sur Fire can continue providing reliable trusted support to the community for years to come.

What are some challenges you face personally as a first responder?
I’m here to respond for both the residents and visitors but sometimes it’s really tough. We can get paged out in the middle of dinner, while spending time with our friends and family, in the middle of the night, and even in the middle of a shower! But as first responders, when that pager goes off, we just go regardless of what we are doing.

Looking back on the past year, what of significance do you feel Big Sur Fire has accomplished?
We have purchased and outfitted a UTV to be used for rescues and initial fire attacks in areas with limited access. We also welcomed Thomas Leahy as a resident captain of the South Coast which is a huge benefit having an officer living down there where response times would be very lengthy otherwise.

If you had one message to get out to the Big Sur community, what would it be?
Always be safe regardless of where you are or what you are doing. Continue staying conscious of our beautiful environment that we live in and help protect it. Don’t hesitate to call if you have an emergency, we are here to support the community.
Rafael Garcia
Joined the brigade in 2011

Where were you born and how long have you lived in Big Sur?
I was born and raised in San Diego, Ca. I have been in Big Sur for about 11 years. I first came to Big Sur on the first day of 2010 when the lovely Monique Bourin offered my wife and I a caretaking position.

What do you love most about living in Big Sur?
I love the freedom of living in Big Sur. The peace and surrounding nature of this area can’t be beat.

When did your love of firefighting/emergency response come to you and how did you discover it?
It has been a life-long fascination, from the time I was 5 and watching the movie “Backdraft,” until this present day.

What do you love most about Big Sur Fire?
I enjoy the camaraderie between all the members. While we are a very serious organization, we have a light hearted side which makes being a part of Big Sur Fire fun.

How does it feel responding to emergency calls right here in your own community?
While responding to emergency calls where I live can be very difficult, it is also the most rewarding because of the people you are helping. Helping others is why I do what I do.

Of all the calls you have responded to in the past year, is there one that stands out to you as most significant?
The Lucia Fire. Aside from the fact that we almost lost a Big Sur landmark, it was the most significant single incident structure fire Big Sur Fire has responded to since the South Coast Center fire near Esalen. It really highlights the importance of training and always being ready.

Is there any particular part of your training that you think helped you in your response to that incident?
Weirdly enough we had just done SCBA training prior to the structure fire. SCBA stands for self contained breathing apparatus. It’s what gives us fresh air in a burning building and guess what most of us had to wear while responding to the Lucia Fire? You guessed it, an SCBA.

Can you recall a funny or otherwise outstanding moment during a call or training?
During the Dolan Fire, one of our firefighters would get “hangry”, which is not surprising since our snack lunches consisted of vienna sausages and cheddar squares.

If you had one wish for Big Sur Fire, what would it be?
My wish is that we can carry on the legacy of this organization, which has been around for nearly half a century.

In your opinion, what are some of the challenges facing Big Sur Fire today?
It’s challenging being an all volunteer department that covers such a vast area. Big Sur is seeing an increased number of visitors, which increases demand for our services. It is such a challenge to keep personnel when housing is lost to part time residents and vacation homes. Also, lack of personnel living south of Partington is a dilemma for our response, due in part to a general lack of housing down there.

If you had only one message to the Big Sur community, what would it be?
Keep on Trucking, the resilience of this community is a beautiful thing.

If you had only one message to the visitors to Big Sur, what would it be?
All are welcome here, please come with love.
For over 47 years, many things about Big Sur Fire have remained constant. Year after year, we accomplish our mission of responding to all emergency calls on the Big Sur coast promptly and professionally. We meet that objective with our well maintained fleet of apparatus and the highly trained firefighters that balance the demands of firefighting with that of their families and careers. Another thing that remains constant is change, and this year Big Sur Fire had its fair share.

In 2021, we said goodbye to longtime member James Barrow, who served on Big Sur Fire’s roster for 28 years. During his time with the organization, James served in nearly every rank from Firefighter to Assistant Chief. His wealth of knowledge, experience and passion for training benefited both the department and the community and for that, we sincerely thank him.

Another departure was long standing member, Marcus Foster who served Big Sur Fire for over 12 years, most recently as Captain of Station 1. With his innate abilities as a firefighter, his resourcefulness, and a great sense of humor, Marcus continually demonstrated excellent leadership at all levels as seen during trainings, meetings and untold numbers of complex incidents. Although his presence among the ranks will be missed, we are grateful for Marcus’s continued involvement as a committee advisor.

It Wasn’t All Goodbyes for Big Sur Fire

This year, we welcomed back former firefighter and captain, Rayner Marx, as our new Quartermaster. With Rayner’s knowledge, experience, and ability to integrate seamlessly back into the organization, we couldn’t have asked for a better fit.

As a non-profit organization, we thrive by having an active Board of Directors made up of community members who truly care about protecting Big Sur. In January, we welcomed Alicia Hahn Peterson and Helen Handshy onto our board, and most recently, Teythe Morgenrath.

Board members are vital to the inner workings of any non-profit, and we continue to thank those who step up to support us in this way.
Perhaps the most noteworthy change for Big Sur Fire in 2021 was the retirement of original charter member and Chief Emeritus, Frank Pinney. Frank has served Big Sur Fire in some capacity since its inception in 1974. Frank first joined as a firefighter, eventually working his way up through the ranks to become Fire Chief in 1992. Frank retired from the Chief’s position in 2009 and has since continued to serve on the Board of Directors. On August 31, 2021, after 47 years of service, Frank officially hung up his Big Sur Fire hat. The organization and the community alike share a debt of gratitude for all the years Frank has dedicated and he will not be forgotten.

If you would like to donate in honor of Frank’s lifelong service, please indicate with your donation or contact Big Sur Fire directly.
Join Us!

Does becoming a firefighter interest you? If you answered yes, then it is certainly a path guaranteed to challenge and fulfill you. You too could become a guardian of our community.

If conducting rescues or fighting fires isn’t for you, perhaps volunteering at one of our many community events may be. Not only does that help raise funds for the department, it connects and builds relationships with community members like you. Joining our board of directors is another way to contribute. Board members are often the ones working behind the scenes ensuring that the many needs of the department and its membership are met. Your help is invaluable so check us out at www.bigsurfire.org, or follow us on Facebook or Instagram for more information on how you can participate.

We truly appreciate all the years of support that YOU have provided to Big Sur Fire which has empowered us to operate as a non-profit, volunteer fire department.
Big Sur Fire

Operational Members
Matt Harris, Fire Chief
Jeannie Alexander, Medical Captain

Engine 7831
Trey Kropp, Captain
Lyle Southall, Engineer
Jim Betts, Firefighter
Rafael Garcia, Firefighter

Engine 7852
Jon Knight, Captain
Jeff Carmichael, Engineer
Mat Jenkins, Probationary Firefighter
Anthony Perez, Probationary Firefighter
Sarah Shashaani, Probationary Firefighter

Engine 7853
Thomas Leahy, Captain
Caleb Chesser, Firefighter
Joel DePola, Firefighter
Mike Handy, Firefighter
Torri Taber, Probationary Firefighter

Board of Directors
Barbara Sexton, Chair
Shana Kropp, Treasurer
Matt Glazer, Secretary
Douglas Drummond
Helen Handshy

Tevye Morgenrath
Alicia Hahn Peterson
MaryAnn Vasconcellos

Advisory Board
Bill Doolittle
Marcus Foster
James J. Hill III
Bob Pavey
Ed Penhoet
Frank Pinney
Nancy Schoendorf

Administrative Personnel
Angela Padilla, Assistant Administrator
Jaci Pappas, Bookkeeper
Dan Gearhart, Photographer
Peter Cobabe, Website Designer
Trey Kropp, IT Consultant
Anonymous
Amber Acosta
Mary L. Adams
Patricia Addleman
Sue Addleman
Michael Afshar
Anneliese Agren
Emily Aiken
Carrie Alley
Christina Almoney
American Legion—Cambria Unit #432
Sergio Aragon
Donna Aragona
Katherine Armstrong
Kathleen Armstrong
Mary Ellen Arn dorfer
Chad & K. Nicole Asarch
Elizabeth Ascoli
Peter & Lucy Ascoli
Jenny Ashley Photography
AT&T
Kate Atkinson
Allan Badiner
Wolfgang Baer
Roger Bagshaw
Amy Baldwin
Kenny Ball
Sybilla & Alex Balkanski
Ada Banks
Analis Bans
Toddi Barbarosh
Bands Family Charitable Trust
Linda Barnwell
Anna A. Bartolini
Philip Bazell
Benevity
Lihi Benisty
Elizabeth Benjamin
Beth & Steve Benoit
Roger & Sandra Bergam
Big Sur Food & Wine Foundation Inc
Big Sur Grange #742
Big Sur River Inn
Big Sur River Run
Diane Bilodeau
Timothy Birchby
Tracey Bird
Blackbaud Giving Fund
Blaze Engineering
Josh & Sarah Bleibtreu
Sarah Bofenkamp
Estate of Diane L. Bohl
Shannon Boyle
Sara & Casey Boyns
Rebecca Brackman
Cheri Brandon
AJ Brann
Jessica Brazen
Emlee & Lyle Brewer
Tracy Brockway
Elizabeth Plaxton Brown
John Brown
Kristina Brown
Marisa Brown
Robin Brown
Robert & Howard Bruni-Barnett
BSCB Enterprises
Alan Buchwald, M.D.
Patricia Bullock
Sobyl E. Bunis
William & Anne Burleigh
Wendy & Joe Burnett
Elizabeth & Kevin Burns
Kevin Burns
Robin Burnside
Karen Burrow
Camaldolese Hermits of America
Bruce Campbell
Lyn Campbell
Sally Rideout & Carole Campo
Elizabeth Canino
Sharen Carey
Cindy Carpenter
Jacy Carroll
Andrea Carter
CERV of Monterey Peninsula
Peter Chamberlain
Gail Chambers
Sylvia Chambers
Sarah Chaney
Carissa Chappellet
Jean Cherie
Erica Chesley
Nona Childress
Sarah Chisholm
Mark Chotiner
Elizabeth Chouinard
Valerie Choy
Sophia Yakir & Bruce Christiansen
Robert Chubrich
Lisa & Anthony Ciani
Catherine Civgin
Cecilia Clahan
Nadine & Dan Clark
John Cluett
Coastlands Mutual Water Co
Sandra Cohen
Thomas Collins
Lisa Gering & Ken Comello
Sarah Comer
Community Foundation for Mo Co
Pamela Conant
Candida Condon
Mary Kay Coo
Richard & Susan Coombs
Christina Courcier
Creative Hands Global
Reed & Briga Cripe
Susan Jennings Croft
Geraldine Cuniff
Sheryl Curtis
Peter Dames
Claudia & William Daniels
Katharine Daniels
Pablo Davanzo
Frederica Miller Davis
Monica de Groot
Selena de Leon
Mary deGruy
Mari Lynch Dehmler
Michael Devincenzi
Barbara Dickason
Martha Diehl
Michael Dobler
Nicole Chupka & Jan Doelman
Bill & Nancy Doolittle
Inga Dorosz
Bruce & Barbara Drobnyk
Douglas Drummond
Megan Dubnicka
R. K. Dusek
Larry Edgett
Eduardo Ezner
El Sur Ranch
Michael & Ronna Emmons
Nichole England
Denise Englbreston
David Erichsen
Megan Escher
Neil Etting
Catherine Fanoe
Susan Farris
Doris Parker Fee Fund
Dorothy Feeley
Pheobe Palmer & Peter Fels
Gary Felsman
Kate Greer & Peter Fenton
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Steve Fields
Marya Figueroa
Maria Finegan
Wesley Finley
John Fisher
Paul & Danah Fisher
Jeanne Flanagan
Derek Fleener
Blake Forrest
Laura Fox
Nancy & Steve Fox
Beau B. Frank
Renee Franken
Linda Frederiksen
Olivia Freeman
Elizabeth Fries
Mary & Frank Fritsch
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Barbara Furbush
Louis Galper
Angelica Garcia
Judy Gardner
Mary Gary
Debra Gavilak
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Walter & Patty Gibeau
Kenneth Giles
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Peggy Gilman
Scott Givens
Pamela Glavis
Laura Glazer
Matthew & Danielle Glazer
Roxanne Gleason
Scott Goldstein
Peggy Goodale
Drew & Myra Goodman
Mike Smith & Grace Greenbach
Martin & Christie Greenwall
DeEtta Greenwall
Lori Gregory
Jane Gregozek
Bunny Gries
Robert & Gini Griffin
Christopher Grimes
James Grossman
Silvia Guersenzvaig
Bruce & Lauren Haase
Oceanna Hain
Samuel & Hope Hale
Wesley Hamm
Christine Hamp
John & Corinne Handy
Peggy Hansen
Anne Happach
Sarah Hardgrave
Michael Harding
Peter Harding
Janet Hardisty
Sam Butrey & Elinda Hardy
Kai Harper
Steven Harper
Nancy Harray
John K. Harrington
Susan Harris
Lillian Hartman
Marty Hartman
Frank & Jo Ellen Hathaway
Jessica Hawkins
Hawthorne Gallery
Kate Healey
Heinemann-Kueffner Fund
of M.C.F.
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Nancy Hernandez
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Heidi Hopkins
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Karen Horst
Virginia Howard
Adair A. Howell
Bannus & Cecily Hudson
Kip & Jay Hudson
David Huyer & Carla Hudson
Linda Hughes
Jonas Bonnetta & Edwin Huizinga
Oona Hull
Marion Hunt
Nathalie Hunton
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Susan Hurd
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Martha Karstens
Demetrius Kastro
David Katz
Karim Strasser Kauffman
Lisa Kaufmann
Patrick Kenedy
Lee Ure & Dennis King
Please accept our apologies for any errors or omissions.
A Request for Support

With your help, Big Sur Fire can remain prepared and equipped to provide emergency assistance whenever you may need it.

In 2020, we expected our call volume to be down due to Covid-19 travel restrictions and the now historic Dolan Fire, but we saw only a minor decrease from 2019. Big Sur Fire responded to 250 incidents along our coast in 2020. Our volunteers put out 18 fires, intervened with 13 illegal campfires, answered 90 medical emergency calls, responded to 51 vehicle accidents, carried out 25 patients needing rescue and attended to 53 other emergency incidents.

As an unincorporated part of Monterey County, most of our land is dedicated to parks and wilderness areas. That means we don't have the necessary tax base to pay for full-time staffed services that other tourist communities take for granted which is why every year we reach out for help from you to fund this important community service. As volunteers, we are your neighbors: moms and dads, caretakers and hospitality workers, builders and weekend warriors.

Please consider making a donation and help fund our operational costs so we can continue to provide these vital emergency services to Big Sur.

Our Mission

Big Sur Fire's mission is to provide dependable fire protection and emergency services for Big Sur with teamwork, respect and integrity.