



NAPA WINERY AND OBR HELP FEED FIRST RESPONDERS DURING THE WINE COUNTRY FIRES

OCTOBER 14, 2017 Kari Ruel

When fire struck Napa and Sonoma late on October 8, no one anticipated the five original fires would become a historic event.

Five days later the fire has grown to over 100,000 acres burned in Wine Country leaving 33 people confirmed dead and more than 3500 structures damaged or destroyed. According to public officials this is going to be a long-term fire effecting more than eight counties north of San Francisco.

Operation BBQ Relief (OBR), founded in May, 2011, is a national nonprofit organization that travels the country providing meals to First Responders and evacuees during major disasters.

On Tuesday night, Woodhouse BBQ owner, Vince Sanchez and his wife, Christina received a call from OBR that they wanted to set up crew to feed the First Responders. They immediately went into action and contacted their BBQ community to get cooks lined up. The first day they provided 1250 hot meals to fire fighters, police and the utility companies. But they needed more ovens. With more help coming from across the country and Canada the need to feed more workers will increase. Currently there are 450 National Guard from California, 140 police officers from around the state and over 2000 fire fighters attacking one of the largest wildfires in California's history.

Robin and Michelle Baggett, owners of Alpha Omega Winery located just south of St. Helena are big BBQ fans and heard about OBR so they donated the use of 10 BBQ units on four trailers.

Eric O'Brien and Chris Carmichael, who work for Alpha Omega are manning the units used by 10 different BBQ companies and their teams volunteering their services.

"We are here for the long haul or however long we are needed," said O'Brien. "The volunteers and response has been overwhelming. It's all about community and family showcasing the human spirit in the time of need."



Vince and Christina Sanchez

O'Brien said on the second day, OBR and crew provided 3,275 hot meals. The needs change hourly according to O'Brien. "The teams are ready to accommodate. We are expecting the national guard to show up at any time and pick up 450 meals."



Vince Sanchez helps the National guard

"To say what we are doing, can't even begin to be described as rewarding," said Sanchez. "This fire is horrific and so many are affected directly or indirectly by this disaster. People are coming together to help."

Sanchez, wife, Christina agrees.

"It's amazing that so many people have come together so quickly to make this happen," said Christina, who helping with the volunteers. "We are all part of a BBQ community and we are always willing to help."

Operation BBQ Relief is set up in the parking lot in front of the kitchen for Ameer D'Maris Events on Devlin Road in Napa. Here Uhaul Trucks, military and other emergency vehicles stop by to pick up meals. Inside several volunteers put meals together and snack packs for the firefighters, which include chips, apples, oranges, granola bars and caffeine chews.

"We are just here to cook and feed the people who need it the most," said Dana Myers, a professional BBQ competitor from Cordelia. "There are actually several of us Professional BBQ chefs here cooking and supporting the community."



Napa County Sheriff John Robertson Kitchen owner Patrick Robertson, Christina Sanchez and Lt. Col Sharyer

Sanchez said he is prepared to accommodate 5000 meals if needed. So far, all the food has been donated including 2400-pounds of meat from Del Monte Meats and many others.

The National Guard did show up to pick up their meals. The volunteers took a deep breath and thought that was the last order for the night. Then a call came in from the local college, where evacuees are staying requesting 800 more meals. Everyone immediately jumped into action and Patrick Robertson, from Amee D'Maris Kitchen yelled out "Have the truck ready in 20." Apparently, it takes just 20 minutes to put 800 meals together.