

15 MINUTES

Rolling them bones

Kurt Geiger was working as gallery supervisor and science educator at the Gateway Science Museum last year when it opened its doors free to the public for several months in the wake of the Camp Fire. Along with his son Carter, who was a volunteer at the museum, Geiger noticed the attention fossils were drawing from guests and started thinking about a career move. After some discussion, the father-son duo decided to go for it and start their own traveling fossil company. Since February, they've been visiting schools—starting with those displaced by the Camp Fire—bringing fossil specimens that students wouldn't normally see outside of a museum. Next month, Fossil on Wheels will hold its first presentation in Paradise at Paradise Ridge Elementary. Find out more at facebook.com/fossilsonwheels.

How many presentations have you done so far?

I think when we do [our presentation] at the new elementary school up in Paradise—the one built in Paradise to replace the others (that one will be Dec. 10)—that will be No. 40. That's a really fun one for us. I did a lot of work with Camp Fire kids after the fire at the museum and so getting to go up there and work with the kids up at that school will be really special.



PHOTO BY JOSH COZINE

We just had one up in Redding; we did eight classrooms and four presentations. It was really cool to get to travel and do this.

What do you enjoy most about this work?

We see the kids drawing the dinosaurs as we've been talking about them, and that means a lot. We know we are giving these kids something that means something. You know, these kids may never have another opportunity to hold a T-Rex tooth or check out a Triceratops fossil or any of the other dinosaurs we have.

What's your business model? Where do you get your fossils?

It's very low overhead. We don't have a lot of expenses. Gas, buying displays and such, but that's not very expensive. The fossils come from a variety of places. Some of them are purchased, a few are self-collected and a lot of them have actually been given to us by other collectors and paleontologists that we've met through an internet forum called The Fossil Forum.

Do you have a favorite fossil?

So this all started because [we're] pretty much shark nuts. And we don't live by the ocean, so you don't often get to talk about sharks in Chico unless you go back in the fossil record. Everybody always wants to know about Megalodon, so we bring in some pretty good-sized Megalodon teeth—we have two that are both over five inches and we use them to explain the different adaptations of sharks and how the specific shape of teeth were related to what they ate.

How often do you do presentations?

We're starting to book a good number of programs for the spring. It's pretty sporadic right now. It comes in bursts. We kind of figured with Thanksgiving break and then winter break right after that it would be kinda slow, but as it turns out we're keeping pretty busy. It also depends on teachers' lessons plans and what time they want us.

—JOSH COZINE

THE GOODS

Anniversaries and new beginnings



by
Meredith J. Cooper
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The weeks leading up to this awful anniversary have been difficult, to say the least. Not nearly as rough as actually going through it, of course, but all the memories have been flooding back.

Driving around Paradise, Magalia and the other communities affected by the fire these days is a much different experience than it was a year ago. From a business perspective, man, times are tough. I was impressed with the brave few owners who reopened their doors early on. If they didn't cater to the cleanup crews, they struggled. But time marches on, and as people fill empty homes and move into RVs while they rebuild, there are more and more places opening up.

A few weeks ago, I stopped by the **Paradise Ridge Chamber of Commerce** for a meeting of contractors. As it was during a blackout, we met in the dark. What an interesting concept—they all acknowledged that no one of them can handle the job of rebuilding the entire Ridge, so they all showed up to forge partnerships. Of particular note were a handful of folks who came down from Alberta, Canada, which endured that country's largest wildfire back in 2016. Others are local and others still plan to open offices in Butte County soon—watch out for a huge surge of blue collars over the next couple months. Where they're all gonna live is anybody's guess, unless they can bunk up with the tree crews at Tuscan Ridge.

A realtor mentioned to the group—and then reiterated to me—that there's a huge need for skilled people who can do things like fix decks, replace damaged doors and windows, etc., on the homes that survived the fire. If you fit that bill, hit up the chamber and you'll probably find some steady work.

NEW BLOOD I came across a couple of new names during my regular research recently that bear mentioning. The first is close to my heart as it's related to my chosen field: **The DogTown Howler**. The newspaper based in Magalia is focused on keeping people in the loop post-Camp Fire. Editor **Tammy Waller Aviles** has put out one issue so far—check it out at dogtownhowler.com.

The second is a particularly cool-looking venture called **Burnt Barn Distilling Co.** Located on the grounds of the former **Chapelle de l'Artiste**, which burned in the fire, the future whiskey distillery is making use of part of the foundation that remains. The pics so far look rad!

BREAKING GROUND In non-Camp Fire-related news, I made it out to **Rolling Hills Casino** for the first time this past weekend (Nov. 2) for the **Paskenta Band of Nomlaki Indians'** 25th anniversary of becoming a federally recognized tribe. To honor the occasion, the casino unveiled its massive expansion plans, which include a **Fatburger** and **Rock and Brews** restaurant/brewery/distillery. Bonus: They served foods off those menus—the Fatburger was delish, and my fave from Rock and Brews was the melt-off-the-bone ribs. Yum.

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