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NEWSLINES CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

with lights, sirens and horn blaring, urging people to evacuate immediately. At one point, the road was blocked by a fallen tree and flames began burning on the roof of the truck. That's when they decided to bug out down the mountain, leading the last of Berry Creek's evacuees to Lake Oroville.

During several more trips up the mountain that night, sometimes stopping to protect properties and extinguish spot fires, Molohon confirmed her house, the fire station and most of the town was gone.

Asked what it was like to be on the ground as her hometown burned, Molohon described scenes of sheer terror.

"There's fires starting everywhere, smoke everywhere," she said. "And explosions. There's ammunition [from homes] going off ... you can tell what it is, but it's unnerving because you can't tell where it's coming from. The propane tanks, when they get hot, they start venting and shooting fire and burning. Some of them explode, and it's like bombs going off. The fire coming in sounds like a jet engine, and you can't hear anything."

Molohon stopped speaking and looked away. "I'm still a bit jittery with loud noises now."

Aftermath

Molohon continued on duty through the first night and the next day, finally signing off some time in the afternoon. She has since taken a break from firefighting while she rebuilds her life. Rankin continued to roam the mountain in the squad pickup for the next few weeks, offering assistance where he could. The Berry Creek company's structure engine, water tender and hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of essential firefighting equipment were lost with the station. Rankin also lost his personal vehicles, as well as those used for his well-drilling

Berry Creek School, destroyed in the North Complex Fire, was directly across Rockerfeller Road from Station 61.

PHOTO BY JASON CASSIDY

business.

GoFundMe campaigns have been established for Molohon and Rankin (see column note), the former by her sister and the latter by Will Cotter, president of the Berry Creek Community Association and a former volunteer with the Berry Creek fire company. Both firefighters got a boost Sept. 10, when they were gifted RVs by EmergencyRV (formerly RV4CampFireFamily), a nonprofit group set up in the wake of the Camp Fire.

In the days following the fire, the Bourasas began assessing damage to people's properties and looking for the missing. They explained they're better suited to this task than outsiders, as they know the lay of the land and Feather Falls' residents. Together, they located the two fatalities. Though their home and the bar were saved, they lost a rental property, several outbuildings and farming and other equipment.

"The hardest thing about this whole thing for me is, sure, I lost some stuff, but that doesn't even compare [to others]," Craig said. "It just doesn't feel fair. Survivor's remorse is painful. Everyone's lost everything, and I can go sleep in my own bed. It's a horrible feeling."

Both the Bourasas and Molohon said Cal Fire has been very supportive since the fire. In the days following the destruction of Berry Creek and Feather Falls, Cal Fire held a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing where all of the volunteers from the two companies got together to share their experiences. They've also been offered ongoing counseling.

Though she admits she's still struggling with loss and her experiences during the fire, Molohon didn't hesitate when asked if she'd return to volunteer firefighting in Berry Creek.

"Absolutely," she said. "I want to go home, and I want to get back to serving my community."

