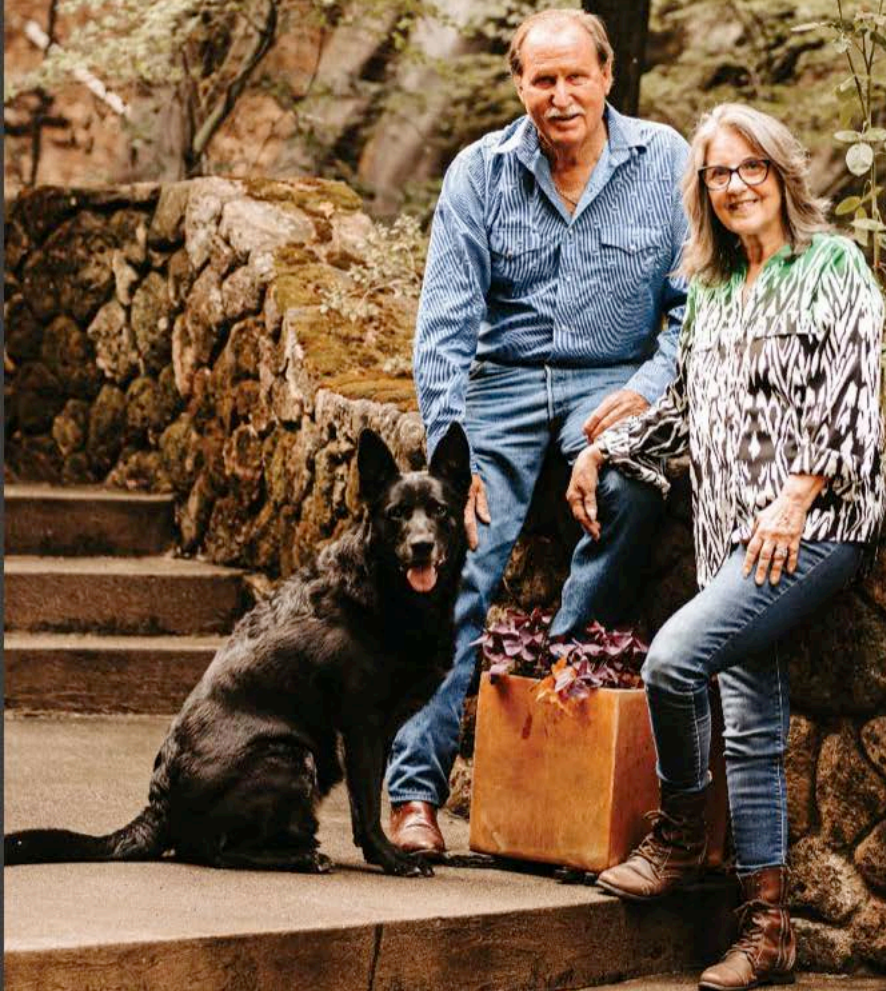


CALISTOGA

Living



Meet a Couple Who
Cherish Calistoga's
History, Then and Now

DAN AND
KATHY BAZZOLI
AND BUDDY

LEARNING TO LIVE WITH FIRE



LIVING By Eden Umble



Piper Cole, Napa Firewise Board of Directors and Calistoga FSC Co-lead, Photo Credit: Eden Umble/Napa Firewise

Everyone who lives in Calistoga has had a brush with wildfires. For some, it's been the uncertainty of evacuating, followed by a grateful homecoming. For others, it means battling a merciless adversary which threatened or scorched homes, properties and livelihoods, or far worse: losing everything. The undeniable effects of climate change – years of drought and hotter temperatures creating tinder-dry conditions – are all around, and the best defense, the only option really, is to become adapted to fire. By becoming actively involved in wildfire preparedness, sharing the responsibility with the firefighting community, Calistoga residents can create a better outcome for themselves.

Fortunately, Napa Firewise and its groundbreaking Calistoga Fire Safe Council are on the case. Napa Firewise, formed in 2004 by concerned fire professionals and community leaders to address the volatile wildfire fuel buildup throughout Napa County, became a non-profit, Napa Communities Firewise Foundation (NCCF), three years later to get access to grants and tax incentives for donors. Starting with free chipping programs and defensible space inspections as well as raising awareness, Napa Firewise has grown exponentially over 16 years into the premier organization that is changing the way Napa County residents think about, and prepare for, wildfire.

A big part of this success comes from the all-volunteer Fire Safe Councils (FSC's), currently at 18 and counting, centered in the highest fire severity regions throughout the county. Comprised of neighbors invested in making their homes and neighborhoods better prepared for wildfires, they do everything from spreading the word on

defensible space and what to pack in a Go Bag, to coordinating with NCCF vegetation management experts, and city & county agencies on ambitious wildfire fuel reduction projects, and more.

The Calistoga FSC is led by the dynamic team of Piper Cole and Eric Carlson. Cole's diverse background includes VP of Global Public Policy at Sun Microsystems, and her passion for cooking and entertaining inspired her ecommerce store Colbrook Kitchen, which sells high function tools for the home cook. Cole is also on the Napa Firewise Board of Directors. Carlson ran the San Francisco office of a boutique investment banking firm before starting the Clean Burn Company a year and a half ago (more on that later).

Among the things they've accomplished in Calistoga are pilot incentive projects such as a Defensible Space Cost Sharing program, reimbursing residents up to \$2000 for work making their homes safer, and Reflect to Protect, an innovative safety program installing reflective 911 address signs at 600 homes. Cole wanted to launch this program for 4 years and got her chance when Bank of The West (BOTW) provided funding this spring. On top of underwriting costs for the signs which make homes easier to find during a wildfire, BOTW provided an army of employee-volunteers to install the signs, which include a home's evacuation zone, and symbols signifying a water source or pool and turnaround space for firefighters' safety and structure defense.

Known for her thoroughness and implementation skills, Cole used this experience as a template and "is putting together a guide on how to replicate this program in other areas of Napa County, or around the



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state." The Calistoga FSC has also done several huge roadside wild-fire-fuel clearing projects this year along Old Lawley Toll Road and Franz Valley School Road, funded by Senator Bill Dodd's 2021 holiday fundraising event which netted \$1.4 million for Napa Firewise. Cole says she's proud of having brought these programs to Calistoga, and of "developing a pretty good email list" reaching nearly 20% of the town's residents. On September 1st, the Calistoga FSC became USA Firewise certified, an official process that can offer residents better access to fire insurance in certified areas.

When asked if she thinks Calistoga is currently more wildfire resilient, Cole says, "I think we are safer for a couple of reasons. Napa Firewise has done a number of projects to build and maintain firebreaks in some of Calistoga's highest wildfire severity zones. There's also increased awareness with people - they're talking about projects with some knowledge of what needs to be done, both locally and around their homes. Increased awareness means increased activity. Fire preparation is a cumulative thing, and it has a multiplier effect."

Eric Carlson lives on a hilly, thickly forested vineyard property north of Calistoga - which for him, for better or worse, became a 50-acre research & development experiment in forestry management. He and his wife bought the land in 2011 and moved here fulltime in 2018; their property was significantly affected by the 2017 Tubbs Fire. One thing he quickly learned was that after the 1964 Hanly Fire, this area was reforested by dropping seeds out of airplanes. A healthy level of forest density is about 100 trees per acre; his had more like 500+, and 4 out of 5 of them - totaling 16,000 - were dead. The other thing he found was that when it came to a solution to his problem, there was virtually no one to call.

Working with an arborist and Carlson's firefighter-son Anders, Carlson embarked on a process to remove the dead trees, which he likens to "eating a giant salad, and realizing that no matter how much you eat, the bowl is still half full." Cutting down dead trees was only the first step. Once felled, they had to be cut up, hauled away somewhere, burned in open burn piles, or chipped which "didn't solve the problem, it only spread it around." At this scale, most of these methods are environmentally unfriendly, cumbersome and absurdly expensive. He heard about another tool in the arsenal: an air curtain burner, commonly known as a burn box.

Basically, a burn box is a 20-foot open-top metal trailer with a leaf-blower type manifold that blows a curtain of air across the top. It burns material at 1800 degrees. Smoke/carbon burns at 900 degrees, so this is a smokeless burn. The air curtain creates a "secondary burn" within the box to capture any embers trying to escape.

This process is able to convert 2-3 100+ foot Douglas Firs into 4 inches of biochar and ash across the bottom of the box.

Carlson and son Anders started "just burning stuff," learning how this technology worked, understanding how it could be used most effectively, and doing "relatively small projects" for local people. Carlson's arborist friend Joe Branum was hauling 30' debris boxes of dead palm fronds from Indian Springs Resort to the dump. They brought the burn box to Indian Springs and disposed of this material permanently, and cleanly, in a few days. As word spread throughout the county, more firefighters joined to fill a roster of 10-15 project slots a day. "In the course of 5 or 6 weeks, we were up to 19 firefighters and 5 civilians on our roster and figured out a way they could bid on daily work," which kept coming. "I got to the point where I said, Oh my god! We're running a business," Carlson says. The Clean Burn Company was born, giving Napa Valley residents a highly useful tool to consider for wildfire fuel reduction & forest debris management.

Carlson first got involved with the Palisades Firewatch group, getting to know his neighbors while mapping the entire Palisades area with Onyx Hunt software, creating "a database that's literally every single parcel, every single property owner - because the residents may be different from the owner, we have the residents identified. It gave us a starting point to define what we are. And then I started to get more involved." When he met Piper Cole, he was considering starting a Palisades FSC, but she asked him to co-chair the Calistoga FSC with her, and "You can do all that you want to do for the whole goddamn thing. I said OK!" he recalls, laughing. "We're very different, we have different capabilities. She's very good at connecting people & projects, she's got a background in technology, she knows how to manage that process, and she's building a really robust database. My belief is, [for my role in this FSC] in order to make a difference, you need to understand the ground. You need to understand the forest and the property in order to come up with a solution" for how that homeowner can make their property more fire resilient.

Carlson says, "Calistoga as a Fire Safe Council is unique. It's the only Fire Safe Council with a city in the middle. It's the largest among all the Fire Safe Councils, and it's got the most diverse terrain. In order for the Calistoga Fire Safe Council to be effective, we have to keep people safe. People have to be able to get out, let's harden your home, and let's harden the forest."

Visit napafirewise.org to learn more.

NAPA VALLEY WILDFIRE FORUM WITH NAPA FIREWISE ZOOM EVENT IS OCTOBER 12, 6-7PM.



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