

THE SIGNPOST

Fourth Quarter, 2019



Dear Members and Supporters of the Park Rangers Association of California,

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Veteran LA Park Ranger Dies After Patrolling Parks Impacted by the Saddleridge Fire

By PRAC President Matt Cerkel

The Park Rangers Association of California wishes to send condolences to the Los Angeles City Park Rangers and the family of Park Ranger Captain Albert Torres. On Friday, October 11, 2019 Captain Torres suffered a heart attack and



collapsed at the Park Ranger Headquarters in Griffith Park after patrolling the LA City Parks impacted by the Saddleridge Fire. He died on Saturday at a hospital.

Captain Torres had served as a park ranger with the City of Los Angeles for 40 years and was well respected in the communities he served. LA City Attorney Mike Feuer paid tribute to Captain Torres: “It brings great sadness today to mourn the loss of our own, the beloved Captain Albert Torres of the Los Angeles Park Rangers. He has

left an everlasting impact on many. He has provided safety to the public, sharing his vast knowledge on plants and wildlife and his constant willingness to offer mentorship and counseling. Over the course of his career, he has worked in every one of the parks in the City of LA. Captain Torres has worked every position and assignment in the Park Ranger Division, including acting Chief. He was incredibly dedicated to our parks and a wonderful partner to many on our staff. He was always upbeat and always willing to roll up his sleeves and help. What an incredible public service legacy for Los Angeles. We will miss him.”

LA City Councilwoman Nury Martinez stated Captain Torres was “the epitome of what it means to be a public servant” and “went above and beyond the call of duty to ensure our parks and open spaces are safe and accessible to the people of Los Angeles. Even last night he was working on the fires, doing what he loved and keeping us all safe. We miss him already. My heart goes out to his family, loved ones, and fellow park rangers.”

Captain Torres will be missed by many. He is survived by his wife Cheryl Torres, daughter Elizabeth Torres and son Brian Torres.

Under the Flat Hat

By Matt Cerkel

In September, Santa Rosa Junior College announced that due to across-the-board budget cuts it was putting its highly regarded Park Ranger Law Enforcement Academy (PRLEA) at its Public Safety Training Center on “hiatus” for 2020. This was despite the fact that the January 2020 session already had 20 students enrolled.

Many, including some longtime PRLEA faculty, are rightfully concerned that once on “hiatus” the program will not come back, given the program complexities, loss of instructors, momentum and equipment to keep it going. The Santa Rosa PRLEA is the oldest program of its type in the country and was started by Bill Orr, one of only 23 recipients of the Park Rangers Association of California Honorary Lifetime Membership Award.



The Santa Rosa PRLEA is one of seven PRLEA’s in the nation and such a loss will be detrimental to the Park Ranger profession in California and nationwide. Santa Rosa PRLEA graduates have gone on to serve with distinction in numerous park agencies in California and across the United States, some reaching the highest levels at their respective agencies. I graduated the Santa Rosa PRLEA in 1994 and it built a strong foundation for my career. Please consider writing a letter or email in support of the restoration of Santa Rosa PRLEA:

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<https://trustees.santarosa.edu/board>

On a different subject, I’m excited about our 2020 California Parks Training Conference which will be at the Whitney Peak Hotel in downtown Reno, NV from March 2 – 5, 2020. Our keynote speaker is [Phil Gaines](#) the recently retired Director of South Carolina State Parks and frequent guest on the [Park Leader Show](#).

Another speaker will be [Paul Berkowitz](#), National Park Service Supervisory Special Agent (RET) and author of *U.S. Rangers: The Law of the Land*. Paul will be speaking about the history of law enforcement in the National Park Service, dispelling many of the myths surrounding the “ranger image.” Contrary to widely held public perceptions, serious crime has existed in our parks from the very beginning, and it is rangers who have borne the responsibility of fighting that crime, often without the meaningful support of management. Highlighting incidents from the late 1800s to the present, Paul’s presentation will focus on how the image of the park ranger has changed over time, resulting in widespread misunderstanding of their legitimate law enforcement role and how that misunderstanding has exacerbated the dangers they face in the performance of their duties.

I have also arranged for Rangers Jessica Phillips and Crystal Lloyd of North Carolina State Parks to present about their “Ask a Ranger” podcast and the North Carolina State Parks [multi-specialist park ranger model](#).

You can [reserve a room](#) at the Whitney Peak Hotel at a special PRAC rate now. We hope to have conference registration available soon - watch PRACnet for updates.

2020 PRAC Conference Update

March 2 -5, Whitney Peak Hotel, Reno

From Andy Brown, Region 5 Director



Hello from the Silver State! My team and I are extremely excited to host the 2020 PRAC Conference, which is just a few months away! If you are excited about visiting the Biggest Little City, you aren't alone. We have an amazing list of trainings available, as well as at least one offsite field trip in the works for Monday, March 2.

Phil Gaines, of the [Park Leaders Show](#) and former Director of South Carolina State Parks, will kick off the conference with a keynote discussion on what makes your park the most important park.

Look for the full list of courses being offered at the conference, as well as conference registration coming soon on the [PRAC webpage](#). For 2020, conference registration is \$300 for members (including agency memberships) and \$350 for non-members. Room rates at the Whitney Peak Hotel are \$103 per night. Click [here](#) to reserve with the special PRAC rate.

Some of the courses that will be offered will include:

- Ranger Safety with Paul Berkowitz, NPS Special Agent (RET) and author
- Weed management through Soil Chemistry
- Use of Interpreters with Park Ranger Management
- Cultural Diversity in Enforcement and Contacts
- Avalanche Forecasting and How to Effectively Garner Public Involvement to Disseminate Current Conditions
- Narcan/Naloxone and Drug Identification Overview
- Ask a Podcast
- Carson City Rifle and Pistol Range: Challenges Faced with Reducing Hours at a Public Range
- Advanced Trail Building and Demands on Public Lands
- The Power of Social Media
- Creating Exhibits to Showcase and Archive Park History and Document Changes in Use and Demographics
- Fire and Fuel Management through Drone Mapped Mastication and Mulching
- Initial Search and Rescue Operations for All Terrains
- Creating and Using Short Films to Document Park History and Provide Interpretation
- Management and Enforcement of Burning Man with BLM
- Mine Safety for First Responders
- Multi-Specialist Park Ranger Model
- Libraries and Parks

Additional courses and course descriptions will be coming soon. The Monday field trip will include tours of historic landmarks throughout the Carson Valley and the Virginia City Comstock, We may be able to offer a field trip to beautiful Pyramid Lake on Thursday, March 5th so stay tuned...more on that to come. If anyone would like to volunteer at the conference, please feel free to contact us at region5@calranger.org or matt@calranger.org. We would welcome volunteers to photograph the conference and tend the registration table.

Looking ahead, the PRAC Board would like to like to hear your suggestions as to where the 2021 PRAC conference should be held - this will be a Southern California year. Click [here](#) for a three question poll to let us know your preferences and offer your suggestions.

Time to Think

By Bill Gabbert

(This article originally appeared in [Wildfire Today](#). Pam Helmke of San Jose Parks secured permission for us to republish it in the signpost. Thanks Pam!)



When I walked into Bill Supernaugh's office one day in 1995 I found him looking out the window with his feet up on his desk. I was the Fire Management Officer and had an appointment with the Assistant Superintendent of Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore to brief him about the prescribed fire we were going to ignite in the park in a few days. I got along well with him and felt comfortable smiling and saying, "Oh sorry, I didn't know you were busy—I'll come back later" and half turned to walk away.

He pointed to a chair and told me to sit down. In the banter that we usually engaged in before getting around to business he explained that he was "thinking", something that he felt was important for a manager in his position, supervising the Operations of a large workforce and a big chunk of public land. Taking time to think gave him the opportunity to mull over the issues of the day and strategize about the direction the park would take. He said a person in his position was more of a thinker than a doer.

I wanted to slink down into my chair and disappear, because what he said made perfect sense and I was giving him a hard time. I was there to brief him

about a project I was going to DO, and he was going to take my information and THINK about it, then approve it, ask for more information, or give me advice about how to do it differently, or not at all.

At 5:00 a.m. on August 26, 1992 Hurricane Andrew made landfall, knocking the crap out of south Florida and four national parks including Everglades, Big Cypress, and Biscayne Bay. Early the next morning I was in a rental car south of Miami driving through Homestead trying to navigate on back roads while driving over downed power lines and other debris. The first power line was scary as hell, but then we realized there was no electricity anywhere.

Navigation was difficult because all of the road and street signs and many of the usual landmarks were gone. Even someone with us that was familiar with the area was disoriented.

We were a Type 1 All-Hazard Incident Management Team with a mission to rescue park employees and restore the infrastructure. It was a huge job and after a few days as Planning Section Chief I felt a little overwhelmed, with lots to do and not enough time in the day to get it all done. In confessing my situation to our Incident Commander, Rick Gale, he said "Order the personnel you need to get the job done. You are paid to think, not do."

After that, I made time, like Bill Supernaugh, to think. Occasionally I even put my feet up on a desk.

Until he retired from the day to day operations of Microsoft, Chairman Bill Gates scheduled a twice-yearly "Think Week" ritual, where he would take a helicopter or float plane to his secret lakeside cabin and... think....by himself....barring all outside visitors. He would rarely leave the cabin during the week except for an occasional walk on the beach, having a caretaker slip him two simple meals a day at the cabin. He subsisted on the two meals, Diet Coke, and Orange Crush.

Think Week was legendary in Microsoft. Gates would pore over about 100 papers written by company executives, researchers, managers, and developers, who hoped to obtain approval for their new project, or a new direction for the organization. Comments that Gates wrote on the papers could give the green light to a new technology that millions of people would use, or send Microsoft into new markets. He had to be careful what he wrote, after finding that a casual "Hey, cool, looks good" could result in 20 people being assigned to a project.

Barack Obama appears to understand how important it is to set aside time to think. Here is part of an accidentally-captured conversation between Obama and British Conservative Party Leader, David Cameron. Cameron asks Obama if he will be taking any time off for a vacation this summer:

Mr. Cameron: Do you have a break at all?

Mr. Obama: I have not. I am going to take a week in August. But I agree with you that somebody, somebody who had worked in the White House who — not Clinton himself, but somebody who had been close to the process — said that should we be successful, that actually the most important thing you need to do is to have big chunks of time during the day when all you're doing is thinking. And the biggest mistake that a lot of these folks make is just feeling as if you have to be ...

Mr. Cameron: These guys just chalk your diary up.

Mr. Obama: Right. ... In 15 minute increments and ...

Mr. Cameron: We call it the dentist waiting room. You have to scrap that because you've got to have time.

Yes. You have to have time to think. Those of us in the emergency management business too often see time to think as a luxury we don't have. True, at times, when split second decisions can have life-long, or even life-dependent outcomes. But when initial attack becomes extended attack morphing into a long duration incident, thinking is not a luxury. It is a necessity.

Seeking Nominations for PRAC Awards

Please take a moment to nominate a colleague for these important awards. Email matt@calranger.org or use this [form](#) to make a nomination. Nominations are due by January 1, 2020.

Medal of Valor

Valor is defined as, "Performing an act above and beyond the call of duty; and, exhibiting exceptional courage, extraordinary decisiveness and remarkable presence of mind, with unusual swiftness of action, without regard for personal safety, in an attempt to save or protect human life.

Public safety personnel are routinely charged with handling emergency situations, and may be called upon at any time to put their own personal safety at risk. Park Rangers and other park professionals fight wild land fires, conduct search and rescue operations, apprehend criminals, provide emergency medical services, and perform other duties to ensure the safety and welfare of the public they serve.

Periodically, park professionals will face emergency situations that are so extreme that by engaging in the emergency, they not only jeopardize their



personal safety, but risk their own lives. There is nothing more precious than human life, and there is nothing more noble than saving human life.

The Park Rangers Association of California Medal of Valor may be presented to any park professional who risks his or her own life to an extraordinary degree in saving or attempting to save the life of another person, or sacrifices him or herself in a heroic manner for the benefit of others.

This award recognizes the recipient's demonstration of unusual courage involving a high degree of personal risk in the face of danger. The heroic act does not have to be related to the recipient's official duties nor occur at their official duty station.

Award of Honor

The Award of Honor may be presented by the Association to individuals whose actions are admirable or heroic, but do not rise to the level required for the Medal of Valor.

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Thanks for reading! Please [let us know](#) if you have ideas for what you would like to see in future issues of *The Signpost*.



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