

Local wildland fire fighter helps in California's large rim fire

Written by George Browning
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Shelley Grimes, a residence of Otisco, is currently out west fighting the large Rim Fire located in California. The Rim fire has scorched over 225,000 acres and now is the fourth largest wildfire in California's recorded history. Nearly 5,000 fire personnel are now battling the flames of the Rim Fire. Grimes is part of a 20 person hand crew that is creating fire breaks in order to prevent the fire from spreading. She and her crew are on a 14 day deployment working 16 to 18 hours a day, sleeping in tents and often in self sufficient Spike Camps. Spike Camps are defined as a Fire Camp with minimum facilities established along the fire line with no electric, running water, and often no communication with the outside.

"It is difficult at times when you don't know. We all take for granted at times how easy it is to just pick up the phone and call your loved ones," exclaimed Richie, her husband. "I worry at times when I don't hear from her for days but she is trained well and I know that she is keeping safety in mind."

Grimes is employed with the Hoosier National Forest Ranger District out of Tell City. Her position there is a Fire Engine Operator. But it did not start there.

In 2000 Grimes headed out west in her 1977 Coachman camper (home) with her dog, Sambo. She started her career as a seasonal firefighter for Lewis and Clark National Forest in Montana, then in 2001 to Nebraska National Forest as an Assistant Engine Boss. From there she went to Daniel Boone National Forest in Kentucky in 2002. There she and Sambo took up residence in the Coachman on the outskirts of London, Kentucky. She also acquired the title of the CPR/First Aid facilitator. In 2010 the Hoosier National Forest offered her a position. Being a native of Jeffersonville, this gave her the opportunity to be closer to her family and loved ones.

"I was grateful for this as we would have never re-met. I knew Shelley growing up as kids and what are the odds that our paths would ever cross again," stated Richie.

Shelley and Richie were married in 2012.

"I am so proud of her and what she does to help preserve our nation's most valuable treasures as well as the homes of so many," her husband said.

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Grimes has been all over the country fighting wildfire. She also has helped with the Space Shuttle Recovery mission as well as Hurricane Katrina clean up efforts.

When not fighting fires she aids in prescribed burns for Hoosier National Forest as well as going to schools in Tell City and teaching children about nature and all its beauty. And yes, she gets to dress up as "Smokey the Bear" from time to time, just another perk of her job.