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Clint Celio: 'It's my turn'

by Jo Rafferty  
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Clint Celio's house almost burned down in the Acorn Fire of 1987, but he said that's not what pushed him to sign up to be an Alpine County volunteer firefighter.

It is also not what convinced the 30-year-old to be the coordinator for the Alpine County Fire Safe Council.

"In a small community like this, you have to have somebody," said Celio. "That's what it takes to get things done. I guess it's my turn."

Celio was 13 when the devastating wildfire swallowed up 24 county homes.



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Shannon Litz/The R-C Fire:  
Clint Celio talks about his job  
and his life.

"It started at 10 in the morning," said Celio, thinking back to the day of the fire. "It was just wispy smoke coming up the canyon. At 1 p.m. the sky was black and day turned into evening. Here comes all the fire trucks up the hill, saying, 'Get out of the way.'"

Celio has been a volunteer firefighter at the Woodfords station for seven years, and has been the Fire Safe Council coordinator for the two years the council has been in existence. The position was approved for another year by the Alpine County Resource Advisory Committee and Celio plans to bid for the contract again.

Approximately \$140,000 is provided to the Resource Advisory Committee each year to benefit the forests within the county, and committee members decide what projects to support. Many times the committee provides funding for Fire Safe Council projects.

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Shannon Litz/R-C photos Fire: Clint Celio is a volunteer for the Alpine County Woodfords Fire Station. At top, Woodfords Fire Station volunteer firefighters are trained in using hand tools for wildland firefighting. Shown



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from left: Fallen Leaf Fire Department Chief Chris Sauer instructs Woodfords volunteer firefighters David Gard, Jim Haen, Rob Levy, Buck McClelland and Mike Gard. Below, Celio talks about his job and his life.

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The committee will meet at 6 p.m. Monday at Diamond Valley School to vote on nearly \$800,000 of incoming projects with \$134,000 left to spend this year.

Celio's duties as coordinator include organizing and facilitating community meetings, writing grants for projects, hiring contractors and completing jobs, supporting agencies with information and educating private land owners about defensible space issues.

But, his biggest accomplishment is creating an annual Alpine County community wildfire protection plan.

"That's the most important thing," said Carson Ranger District spokesman Franklin Pemberton. "Clint has done a lot of work with this Fire Safe Council. It's real good, important work."

Celio has also written fire plans for six other fire districts in the Tahoe Basin and worked on the Nevada State Wildfire Assessment Project that spans 246 communities in all the state's counties.

Celio has lived in Woodfords all his life. He attended Diamond Valley School, where his 5-year-old daughter is now enrolled, and graduated from Douglas High School in 1992.

Celio also owns his own business, C.G. Celio & Sons Co., the same name his great-great grandfather called his ranching and logging operation in about 1900.

"I resurrected the name of the business. I'm one of the sons," said Celio.

His great-great-grandfather also ran the Meyers Hotel. The Celio family owned about 2,800 acres in South Lake Tahoe and Meyers. Now it owns about 100 acres. The original C.G. & Sons Co. lasted until the 1950s.

After earning a master's degree in forestry and geographic information services from Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Celio returned to his hometown and started a geographic information services consulting business.

"I work with local counties, utility districts and the National Guard in a variety of states to implement facility information systems," said Celio.

With the geographic information services program, Celio tracks various agencies' assets across the country, laying out site plans and maps.

Even though Celio didn't choose firefighting to be his main line of work, he said he gets satisfaction from it.

"You really get to help folks out," he said.

Future challenges are coming with the changing demographics in the county, which is

becoming more of a retirement community, he said.

"It could change - like Kirkwood - if it becomes more of a transient, tourist population," said Celio. "At Kirkwood, one month you may have 30 volunteers and the next month you may have none."

Markleeville and Woodfords, he said, need to develop a vision of where they want to be in five or 10 years so that any new developments aren't approved haphazardly.

When volunteering as a firefighter or attending fire council meetings, Celio gets to work alongside people he grew up with when he lived in the little green house next to Woodfords Station on Highway 88.

"I absolutely loved living up here, particularly growing up here," said Celio. "After traveling, I always came back to ... you just can't beat this place. It looks like this is where I'm going to bring up my family."

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