

CALIFORNIA IDAHO NEVADA OREGON UTAH
WASHINGTON WYOMING

Thick smoke blanketed Oakhurst Farm as evacuated horses poured onto the farm from other fire-ravaged areas



Rising from the Ashes

Oakhurst Farm became a hub for Oregon wildfire evacuees

BY ERIC MITCHELL | PHOTOS COURTESY BEN ROOT

WILDFIRES ARE RARE in Oregon, so when one erupted before dawn in early September, Silverton mayor Kyle Palmer was more curious than concerned.

Within hours, though, Palmer's curiosity became dismay as the fire, started by sparks from gale force winds whipping power lines, consumed acres by the minute. As it advanced on Evans Valley Stables, where Palmer works part-time after managing the operation owned by Dr. Rodney Orr for 20 years, he struggled with deciding which of the 35 horses had to be saved.

"I remember vividly that we were triaging," said Palmer. "We didn't know where we would go and did not imagine we'd get every horse off the property because of the numbers."

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2020 LEADING SIRES IN CALIFORNIA

For daily updated sire lists
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Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2021 Stud Fee	Rnrs/ Wnrs	BT SWnrs/ Wns	Rstrct SW/ BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	Cumulative				
							2020 Earnings	Foals	Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	I'LL HAVE ANOTHER (09, Flower Alley), Ocean Breeze Ranch	\$10,000	213/110	2/2	1/2	(Another Truth, \$300,020)	\$4,834,814	361	3	0.96	1.10
2	STAY THIRSTY (08, Bernardini), Lovacres Ranch	\$10,000	178/89	8/11	2/8	(Mind Control, \$242,429)	\$3,564,875	*498	13	1.25	1.39
3	SQUARE EDDIE (06, Smart Strike)	Pnsd	94/50	1/1	1/1	(Rookie Mistake, \$209,837)	\$2,715,970	239	17	1.52	1.16
4	SIR PRANCEALOT (IRE) (10, Tamayuz), Rancho San Miguel	\$15,000	121/53	3/4	0/3	(Beau Recall, \$430,900)	\$2,249,729	*283	9	1.30	0.93
5	GRAYDAR (09, Unbridled's Song), Milky Way Farm	\$4,000	138/59	0/0	0/0	(Dream Marie, \$178,540)	\$2,140,314	*289	5	0.90	1.41
6	MR. CLUBHOUSE RIDE (08, Candy Ride), Legacy Ranch	\$7,500	94/39	5/5	5/5	(Smiling Shirlee, \$188,620)	\$1,760,987	228	9	1.09	1.01
7	GRAZEN (06, Benchmark), Tommy Town Thoroughbreds	\$6,000	74/31	3/3	3/3	(September Secret, \$135,960)	\$1,667,785	186	11	1.57	1.04
8	CLUBHOUSE RIDE (08, Candy Ride), Legacy Ranch	\$3,500	48/25	1/4	0/1	(Warren's Showtime, \$412,980)	\$1,554,672	87	2	1.39	0.90
9	LUCKY PULPIT (01, Pulpit)	Died, 2017	95/40	3/4	2/3	(Fashionably Fast, \$190,500)	\$1,484,768	*478	12	1.23	1.03
10	JERSEY TOWN (06, Speightstown), Daehling Ranch	\$3,000	81/42	1/1	0/1	(Angelus Warrior, \$88,995)	\$1,322,876	*178	4	0.99	1.09
11	UNUSUAL HEAT (90, Nureyev)	Died	51/27	2/2	2/2	(Cali Caliente, \$142,420)	\$1,305,021	*831	51	1.86	1.16
12	MINISTERS WILD CAT (00, Deputy Minister), Tommy Town Thoroughbreds	\$4,000	94/44	1/1	0/1	(Colt Fiction, \$87,000)	\$1,218,334	515	20	0.94	0.89
13	VRONSKY (99, Danzig), Harris Farms	\$3,500	73/32	0/0	0/0	(On Mars, \$161,520)	\$1,205,136	298	10	1.23	1.05
14	ACCLAMATION (06, Unusual Heat), Harris Farms	\$4,000	58/29	0/0	0/0	(Take the One O One, \$124,800)	\$1,054,291	152	3	0.97	1.21
15	MR. BIG (03, Dynaformer), Rancho Temescal	\$4,500	41/13	2/3	1/2	(Big Sweep, \$212,750)	\$838,799	88	4	1.57	0.89
16	MISREMEMBERED (06, Candy Ride), Barton Thoroughbreds	\$2,500	39/16	0/0	0/0	(I Recall, \$89,830)	\$742,295	117	6	0.98	1.16
17	EMPIRE WAY (09, Empire Maker), Heinz & Michelle Steinmann Farms	\$2,500	76/30	0/0	0/0	(MUCHA WOMAN, \$50,360)	\$705,982	150	2	0.64	0.91
18	RICHARD'S KID (05, Lemon Drop Kid), Rancho San Miguel	\$2,500	27/18	0/0	0/0	(Sheza Girly Girl, \$146,926)	\$702,569	66	0	1.09	0.97
19	IDIOT PROOF (04, Benchmark), Victory Rose Thoroughbreds	\$3,000	32/21	1/1	0/1	(Bulletproof One, \$195,762)	\$646,716	109	2	1.15	0.93
20	CYCLOTRON (00, Grand Slam), Old English Rancho	Private	35/21	1/1	0/1	(Tee Em Eye, \$111,021)	\$638,308	150	3	0.98	1.11
21	SLEW'S TIZNOW (05, Tiznow), Rancho San Miguel	\$3,000	44/20	1/1	0/1	(Trapalanda, \$59,755)	\$580,969	145	6	0.90	0.98
22	CHAMP PEGASUS (06, Fusaichi Pegasus)	N/A	78/28	0/0	0/0	(Tap It Champ, \$64,480)	\$572,620	205	0	0.33	1.01
23	INDIAN EVENING (09, Indian Charlie)	N/A	18/11	1/2	0/1	(Sneaking Out, \$260,110)	\$517,818	62	3	1.19	1.06
24	COMIC STRIP (95, Red Ransom)	Died, 2017	24/14	1/1	1/1	(Indian Peak, \$143,940)	\$506,733	361	13	0.84	1.09
25	U S RANGER (04, Danzig)	N/A	61/17	0/0	0/0	(Zelaia, \$50,606)	\$484,787	*407	3	0.64	1.21
26	DESERT CODE (04, E Dubai), Harris Farms	\$2,000	38/20	0/0	0/0	(Songofthedesert, \$84,046)	\$480,600	165	4	0.84	0.99
27	ANTHONY'S CROSS (08, Indian Charlie), Special T Thoroughbreds	\$2,500	16/8	2/3	1/2	(Joy's Rocket, \$184,444)	\$439,560	55	2	0.92	0.95
28	DECARCHY (97, Distant View)	Died, 2017	42/16	0/0	0/0	(My Friend Tony, \$81,072)	\$422,028	438	13	0.96	0.93
29	EDDINGTON (01, Unbridled), Ballena Vista Farm	\$3,500	23/10	1/1	1/1	(Fast Enough, \$134,000)	\$402,700	*467	12	1.14	1.35
30	CURLIN TO MISCHIEF (11, Curlin), Rancho San Miguel	\$3,500	22/9	1/2	1/1	(Good With People, \$199,000)	\$386,961	56	1	0.85	0.90
31	SMART BID (06, Smart Strike), Milky Way Farm	\$2,500	33/11	1/1	1/1	(Arthur's Hope, \$108,486)	\$380,493	89	1	0.61	0.96
32	HEATSEEKER (IRE) (03, Giant's Causeway)	Died, 2016	39/17	0/0	0/0	(Peace Seeker, \$56,545)	\$364,729	*232	8	0.93	1.19
33	THE PAMPLEMOUSSE (06, Kafwain)	Pnsd	19/10	0/0	0/0	(North County Guy, \$80,140)	\$361,586	127	0	0.59	1.01
34	SOUTHERN IMAGE (00, Halo's Image), Gray's Farm	\$1,500	26/13	0/0	0/0	(Do You Hear That, \$53,998)	\$350,982	*527	7	1.02	1.11
35	GOVERNOR CHARLIE (10, Midnight Lute), Lovacres Ranch	\$3,000	29/10	1/2	1/1	(Governor Goteven, \$153,000)	\$347,022	54	1	0.61	0.72
36	KAFWAIN (00, Cherokee Run), Tommy Town Thoroughbreds	\$2,500	31/14	0/0	0/0	(Silken Prince, \$56,558)	\$341,078	*653	18	0.97	1.17
37	GERVINHO (10, Unusual Heat)	N/A	27/11	0/0	0/0	(After Midnight, \$44,000)	\$332,887	44	0	0.47	1.08
38	TIZBUD (99, Cee's Tizzy)	Died, 2020	25/12	0/0	0/0	(Bud Knight, \$71,640)	\$318,903	225	7	0.97	0.85
39	LAKERVILLE (08, Unusual Heat), Harris Farms	\$2,500	25/10	0/0	0/0	(Queensbeccaandjane, \$55,540)	\$301,265	60	1	0.69	1.23
40	TIME TO GET EVEN (04, Stephen Got Even)	Died, 2019	16/8	0/0	0/0	(Time for Ebby, \$93,278)	\$297,596	85	1	0.80	0.72

Palmer texted Ben Root, the operations manager of longtime business partner Oakhurst Thoroughbred Farm an hour away, asking if they would shelter some horses. Root offered to take 10-20 and stressed to Palmer to keep him updated on any changes. An hour later Palmer called

and asked Root to bring trailers.

The fire had gone from five miles away to two miles "to—boom—on their farm," recalled Root. "The staff were packing up their houses to get out of there."

When Palmer told Root they would have to choose the horses to move, Root put out

a plea on Facebook for anyone with a truck and trailer to be at Evans Valley Stables, which has produced top horses such as multiple grade 1 winner and top 10 California sire Smiling Tiger.

"Within five minutes we had to take the post down because so many people were



From left, Ben Root, Dr. Jack Root, and Kyle Palmer

2020 LEADING SIRES IN OREGON

For daily updated sire lists visit [BloodHorse.com](https://www.bloodhorse.com)

Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2021 Stud Fee	Rnrs/Wnrs	BT SWnrs/Wns	Rstrct SW/BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2020 Earnings	2020 Foals	Cumulative		
									Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	HARBOR THE GOLD (01, Seeking the Gold), Bar C Racing Stables	\$5,500	64/35	5/6	0/5	(Zabracadabra, \$65,910)	\$826,793	400	25	0.60	0.70
2	GIACOMO (02, Holy Bull), Oakhurst Thoroughbreds	\$2,500	27/5	0/0	0/0	(Rona, \$25,559)	\$195,489	*362	10	0.95	1.04
3	SIXTHIRTEEN (04, Dixie Union), Bar C Racing Stables	\$1,000	13/6	0/0	0/0	(Battle Point Red, \$17,090)	\$81,341	59	0	0.30	0.54
4	GRINDSTONE (93, Unbridled)	Pnsd	16/4	0/0	0/0	(Grinder Sparksaglo, \$32,093)	\$81,340	*650	17	0.93	1.39
5	UNDERSTATEMENT (05, Distorted Humor), Nance Training Stables	\$1,000	11/3	0/0	0/0	(Stay in Grace, \$32,280)	\$59,018	42	0	0.40	0.48

willing to help,” Root said.

“Ben hadn’t even gotten to the farm for the first haul when a network of people, a lot of people we didn’t even know, showed up to help us,” Palmer said. “They came in trailer after trailer, and we started stuffing in horses in ways we never would have before. Normally there is a lot of scrutiny about who is next to who and that was thrown out the window. By that time, the air was bad, and it was getting increasingly hard to breathe. These people were unbelievable.”

All 35 horses—most of them yearlings and weanlings—were taken to Oakhurst near Newberg, and they were just the first wave of evacuees that poured in over the next 36 hours. Oakhurst is also home to Dr. Jack Root’s veterinary clinic, the primary business on the family-owned and -operated farm. Throughout Sept. 8-9, clients and friends of clients called the vet clinic and farm looking for a place to escape four different wildfires that would destroy more than a million acres south of Portland. The farm’s horse population ballooned from 35 to around 155.

“It was full-blown crisis management,”

said Ben Root. “I had my own issues trying to get horses at Evans Valley loaded that have never been on a trailer, so I didn’t know what was going on at the farm until I got back. When I get back, there are trucks and trailers down the road and vet techs with clipboards outside. We basically filled up without putting out an offer. We just said ‘Yes’ when people called.”

With its stalls, paddocks, and pastures filled, Oakhurst quickly faced a new cri-

sis of ensuring the evacuees had enough to eat.

The Roots didn’t want to bill anyone for keeping the evacuated animals—at one point the farm also took in 17 goats—because the owners faced losing their homes and farms. Oakhurst, though, didn’t have the resources to shoulder the entire cost of care for an undetermined time.

“People were texting my dad and asking what they could do, and we kept



Top: Horses at Oakhurst Farm in September; above, a line of horse trailers lined up to unload rescued horses at Oakhurst Farm

Special Note For Sire Lists:

For stallions that stand, will stand, or stood (deceased) in the selected region (stallions that have died or been exported prior to the 2015 breeding season are excluded), and have runners in North America. Listed below are all available Northern Hemisphere statistics through December 6, 2020. As supplied to *The Blood-Horse* by The Jockey Club Information Systems, Inc., earnings include adjusted money from Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore. Adjusted earnings are put on par with average North American earnings from the previous year. For example, the average North American purse in 2019 is \$25,300 or 53% of the 2019 average purse in Japan. To put earnings on par, all Japanese progeny earnings are multiplied by 53% before being credited to a sire’s progeny earnings. Hong Kong earnings are adjusted by 17%; Singapore by 85%. Current year stakes winners include all N.H.-foaled black-type stakes winners worldwide. *Foal counts include Southern Hemisphere. Cumulative stakes winners include all countries. (A ¶ indicates a sire represented by his first crop to race).

telling them we were fine, but behind the scenes we were starting to panic a little,” said Root. “We weren’t working at the clinic because of these fires, and vet techs were feeding round the clock alongside the barn and farm crew. I decided, what the heck, let’s see what happens. I put it out on Facebook that Oakhurst had taken in these horses and we needed hay. The phone went ding, ding, ding throughout dinner and all the next day. The horse community is so amazing.”

Oakhurst got hay, bedding, and feed donations by the truckload. The farm received so much hay that it gave bales to the horse owners when they returned to what was left of their homes. An entire truckload of hay got redirected to a county fairground also sheltering evacuated animals, and a couple of loads went to a farm sheltering alpacas. The Wilco Farm Store

in Newberg that sent weekly feed shipments to Oakhurst voluntarily doubled the order and covered the extra cost. A nearby Purina dealership also donated feed as did individuals who just showed up with a half dozen bags of grain.

“We were shy and hesitant about asking, but when we did, people from all walks of life donated to the cause. I got Visa cards that I handed out to people who were driving the most, moving horses,” Root said. “We never said we needed money, but I had people from Alaska to Georgia contacting us to say, ‘Hey, I want to donate 25 bucks or 50 bucks.’ We ended up with a medical fund of several hundred dollars that we used for the horses with minor cuts or scrapes that was for cost of services.”

The unpredictable and rapidly shifting Oregon fires forced many horse owners to relocate their animals multiple times. For 48 hours the Roots worried they might be in the same predicament with 125 horses they just rescued and their own, which includes Kentucky Derby (G1) winners Grindstone, who is a pensioner, and Giacomo, who is at stud.

As horses streamed into Oakhurst that first day, a new fire broke out on Chehalem Mountain six miles away. Property owners celebrating their purchase of 80 acres on the mountain with a bonfire Monday night had not extinguished the fire before turning in for the evening. Embers carried by subsequent high winds ignited

the wildfire, according to multiple news reports.

Michelle Michelsen, a longtime Oakhurst client, owns and operates Bald Peak Equine Rehab on Chehalem Mountain. She and her husband had just returned home Tuesday afternoon after helping evacuate horses from a wildfire near Hagg Lake when she got a call from Jack Root, who told her to come to Oakhurst if she needed to evacuate.

“I told him we had just evacuated horses and were fine,” Michelsen said. “We then went back out and were talking about how scary it looked down in the valley with the fires merging; there were these big black and brown clouds. We were taking pictures and never thinking we would have to evacuate. Then we turned around to see a huge plume of smoke behind us, not knowing a fire had started on the other side of the hill.”

Fortunately, Michelsen had an emergency plan she had created two years earlier following a workshop hosted by Oakhurst. She set off a chain of phone calls that delivered 20 trailers to her driveway within 15-20 minutes. Some horsemen who arrived had not even gotten called but heard news reports or seen social media posts on the Cowgirl 911 Facebook page about the fire and knew Michelsen had a farm on the mountain. Getting 30 horses, many in rehabilitation for injuries, loaded onto trailers took more time than

2020 CALIFORNIA SIRE BY WINNERS

Sire	Rnrs	Wnrs
I'll Have Another	213	110
Stay Thirsty	178	89
Graydar	138	59
Sir Prancealot (IRE)	121	53
Square Eddie	94	50
Ministers Wild Cat	94	44
Jersey Town	81	42
Lucky Pulpit	95	40
Smiling Tiger	94	39
Vronsky	73	32
Grazen	74	31
Empire Way	76	30
Acclamation	58	29
Champ Pegasus	78	28
Unusual Heat	51	27
Clubhouse Ride	48	25
Cyclotron	35	21
Idiot Proof	32	21
Slew's Tiznow	44	20
Desert Code	38	20
Richard's Kid	27	18
U S Ranger	61	17
Heatseeker (IRE)	39	17
Decarchy	42	16
Misremembered	39	16
Elusive Warning	32	16
Kafwain	31	14
Comic Strip	24	14



Smoke rising from a wildfire on Chehalem Mountain, six miles from Oakhurst Farm

2020 LEADING SIRES IN WASHINGTON



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Rank	Stallion (Foreign foaled), (YOB,Sire), Where Stands	2021 Stud Fee	Rnrs/Wnrs	BT SWnrs/Wns	Rstrct SW/BT SW	(Chief Earner, Earnings)	2020 Earnings	Foals	Cumulative		
									Stks Wnrs	A-E Index	Comp Index
1	COAST GUARD (05, Stormy Atlantic), El Dorado Farms	\$2,000	42/19	0/0	0/0	(Satellite Storm, \$33,900)	\$342,437	87	5	0.53	0.54
2	ABRAAJ (03, Carson City)	Died, 2019	43/17	0/0	0/0	(For You Only, \$22,160)	\$288,204	105	7	0.56	0.66
3	GALLANT SON (06, Malabar Gold), West Coast Training Center	\$1,250	13/5	0/0	0/0	(Gallant Warren, \$47,260)	\$191,380	21	0	0.57	0.68
4	NATIONHOOD (02, Cherokee Run), Blue Ribbon Farm	Died, 2020	18/11	0/0	0/0	(Spot On, \$27,430)	\$166,772	74	2	0.43	0.65
5	GOATHAM CITY (98, Saint Ballado)	Died, 2019	8/3	0/0	0/0	(Gotham Desire, \$81,864)	\$140,572	189	0	0.69	0.79
6	WAR POWER (06, Pulpit), Frances Long	Private	18/10	0/0	0/0	(Pulpits Power, \$29,982)	\$134,222	35	1	0.34	0.41
7	DEMON WARLOCK (00, Demons Begone), Roche Farm	\$1,500	4/2	1/1	0/1	(Alittlesstalk, \$77,000)	\$101,022	54	4	0.57	0.62
8	LINCHPIN (10, Elusive Quality)	N/A	18/6	0/0	0/0	(Pin Up Lady, \$16,243)	\$92,159	35	0	0.23	0.46
9	PARKER'S STORM CAT (00, Storm Cat)	N/A	17/6	0/0	0/0	(Cross Creek, \$32,700)	\$90,658	*333	4	0.81	0.99
10	¶ NOOSITO (11, Harbor the Gold)	Died, 2018	3/2	1/2	0/1	(Dutton, \$71,500)	\$83,350	8	1	1.46	0.71

Michelsen comfortably had.

“We were in the middle of loading and a sheriff deputy came up our driveway and told us, ‘You have to go now.’ I told him we were doing the best we can but needed to get the animals off the mountain,” Michelsen recalled. “I never thought I would have to get horses off this fast, but it was a miracle the way everyone showed up.”

All the horses went to Oakhurst, where Michelsen also parked a horse trailer with living quarters alongside her 77-year-old mother’s travel trailer. An Oakhurst pasture became their home for five days.

“From the pasture we had a bird’s-eye view of our house. We could see it perfectly, the lights from the fire engines on the hill, and we were listening to the police scanners calling our address and calling in for more water and saying structures were threatened. The fire burned down to within 100 feet of our house. It was the scariest 24 hours of my life,” Michelsen said.

Ben Root was concerned, too.

“I feel badly that we had to put the pause on taking in more horses at one point,” he said. “But we literally were starting to triage our own horses. My dad was not worried because we were surrounded by mowed pastures, but the rest of us were packing up a few things.”

A shift from dry easterly winds to wetter winds from the West ultimately saved the homes on Chehalem Mountain and prevented the fire from ever becoming a serious threat to Oakhurst. Three barns on the mountain burned but no lives were lost. Michelsen said the generosity shown by the Oakhurst staff and the Roots during this time was “beyond amazing.”

“Wednesday night we went into town to get dinner and when we got back, Cookie had put a bottle of wine in my trailer,” Mi-



COURTESY MICHELLE MICHELSEN

Fire forced Michelle Michelsen, shown here, to evacuate 30 horses from her rehabilitation operation on Chehalem Mountain and nearly took her house and farm

chelsen said, referring to Jack Root’s wife. “They made sandwiches and wouldn’t let us do any work on the farm. They told us to just chill and relax.

“The way our world is kinda upside down right now, in the big picture, it was heartwarming and amazing that there are still tons of good people,” she continued. “When it comes to it, we are there for each other.”

The weather change that saved Chehalem’s community also saved Silverton and Evans Valley Stables.

“All the fire professionals I’ve talked to since said if the weather had not turned, our town (Silverton) would have burned or been severely damaged,” said Palmer. “The farm where the horses were would have been hit before the town, the way the fire was coming in. It was a very close call.”

Firefighters got the flames contained

but thick, lingering smoke made the air quality throughout Central Oregon hazardous for a couple of weeks. At Oakhurst, Jack Root said the smoke was so thick at one point that from his house he could not see a barn that was an eighth of a mile away. Most of Evans Valley’s horses stayed at Oakhurst for more than a week until the air cleared enough for them to be returned home.

Among all the horse owners that sheltered their animals from four days to a month and a half at Oakhurst, none of them lost their homes. At worst, one farm lost some fencing, according to Ben Root.

“In a year that has been really frustrating and angering, regardless of what side you’re on (politically) or because of COVID, that week was amazing for renewing faith in humanity,” he said. “I don’t know if it is just horse people, but they were spectacular.” **BH**