



## **Volunteer Cremains Recovery Team Returns to Santa Rosa**

Over the past two weeks the clean-up effort from the October firestorm that destroyed nearly 3,000 homes and buildings in Santa Rosa, CA has intensified. Homeowners became our clients when they asked us for help to recover the previously cremated remains of their loved ones. We headed to Santa Rosa on November 18th with six dog teams, 15 archaeologists and additional search support personnel. All professionals and all volunteers, they came from as far away as Los Angeles to assist in searching 24 homes.

While we were very successful, some sites were more difficult than others. Multi-story homes made discovery difficult if the cremains were on the ground level. As the second floor and roof collapsed it appeared to spread the cremains. The scent was there but collection was difficult. In most cases we were able to collect most of the cremains. Many clients stated that they were happy even though we weren't able to collect everything. They felt that an

attempt had been made to recover their loved ones, and a little bit of closure was better than none.

We have discovered a definite need. We know now, without a doubt, the dogs can find and alert on modern cremains in addition to the historic and prehistoric cremains we normally work. We can use this ability to assist after a major disaster such as this.

We are so grateful to everyone who participated in this effort, on their own time and dime. We brought comfort to so many people who had nowhere else to turn.

Lynne Engelbert



Adela Morris, Director, ICF; archaeologist Alex DeGeorgey ; Lynne Engelbert, ICF Associate, Jasper and Piper

**Special Thanks:**

ICF would like to extend a special thank you to Alex DeGeorgey, Alta Archaeological Consulting in Santa Rosa, for first recognizing a need in his community and doing the research that resulted in him finding ICF. The

resulting teamwork not only helped so many families, but is continuing into a possible new adventure ... that of creating a way to help others all over the country after a major disaster. We look forward to continuing this partnership with Alex.



**Fire damage in one Santa Rosa neighborhood.**

Photo credit: Los Angeles Times



Jasper says "Dig Here", and he was right.



Archaeologists Alex DeGeorgey, Kimberly Wooton, and Robert Watson start their excavation looking for cremains.



Only two sets of cremains were found intact. One in a metal box and another that was in

a porcelain urn that had been thrown 30 feet from where it had been sitting on a shelf. Some of the cremains recovered were in big clumps but most were scattered because of the fire and falling objects.

Archaeologists Laurel Lueders and Bryan Much recover cremains. After the dogs identified where to dig the archaeologists started the careful uncovering of the top layers of ash until they saw the unique color and texture they were looking for. You can see the golden brown coloration where Bryan is recovering the cremains.

~Adela~



**Left**

Recovered human cremains, most of the cremains had turned the golden color, only a few retained the gray color.

**Right**

Box of cremains buried deep in ash were found intact after the dog alerted on top of it.



**Left**

Zabra alerts while home owner watches.

**Right**

Amiga searching, this was the typical site at each location.



Piper comforts one of her clients.

November 25th, Alex, Lynne, Adela along with Piper and Jasper, returned to find the location of 6 more lost cremains and plan on returning December 3rd for the last time. The clean-up crews are moving fast, clearing all the burned areas. This has truly been an experience we will never forget.

~Adela~

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We are happy to talk to you about your project and how our dogs might help locate human remains or burials. Email or call us.

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