



SCOTT MACDONALD/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN FILE PHOTO

Soledad firefighter Jesus Sanchez gets sprayed with water during a firemen's muster event in October 2005, where a barrel is pushed along a wire using a stream of water during the Soledad Wine and Wind Festival.

Soledad remains close to its volunteer firefighting roots

Five serve full time and 25 donate labor to the department

By **JANICE AUSTIN**
For The Salinas Californian

When it began in 1925, the Soledad fire department was an all-volunteer fire department and remained that way until 1998.

"We have just hit our 80th year of existence," said Soledad fire Chief Jesse Casillas. "Up until the last eight years, the department was an all-volunteer department that consisted primarily of the local

SOLEDAD FIRE DEPARTMENT

- n **CHIEF:** Jesse Casillas
- n **STAFFING:** Five full-time paid, 25 volunteers.
- n **LOCATION:** 525 Monterey St., Soledad.
- n **HISTORY:** Established in 1925; all-volunteer department until 1998.
- n **ONLINE:** www.cityofsoledad.com/departments/fire.

merchants and business owners in town ... There's a lot of history in the fire department and a lot of members who spent a significant amount of time as volunteers."

Al Pura, a barber in town for about 50 years was also a volunteer firefighter for 50 years, Casillas said.

"That's something that's real-

ly commendable," he said. "To find somebody to do that type of work for 50 years for free is amazing. And there are quite a few community members still today who have spent a significant amount of time as volunteers, such as our mayor, Richard Ortiz, who spent approximately 28 years as a volunteer fireman."

The Soledad fire department now has five full-time paid firefighters and 25 volunteers.

The department provides services more than 97 square miles.

"We are the city's fire department," Casillas said. "However, we also provide contractual services to the Mission Soledad Rural Fire Protection District that surrounds the rural areas of Soledad. We're responsible for their protection as well."

The city of Soledad has a population of about 17,000, and another 7,000 people live in the Mission Rural Fire Protection District.

See **SOLEDAD**, Page 7