



THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN FIRE PHOTO

Soledad firefighters responded to a structure fire at 604 Monterey St. in Soledad. The home kitchen, living room, and Bathroom suffered fire damage while the rest of the home had smoke and heat damage. An individual living in an attached studio apartment smelled smoke and discovered to home on fire. Two families were displaced by this fire.

# SOLEDAD/ City, demand grows

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The department serves a population of 24,000 residents.

Casillas has been the department chief since August 2004. "Firefighting in itself is unique," he said. "It's hard to say what would make us any different from any of the other agencies ... The camaraderie is unlike any other. It's literally a second family. You have fire personnel who live together and eat together, so they develop a bond."

Soledad's rapid growth rate remains the fire department's greatest challenge, according to Casillas: "The challenge is ensuring that our department grows commensurate with the growth of the city."

Casillas introduced two new fire engineers, Jacob Arteaga and Carlos Cabrera, at the March 1 Soledad City Council meeting.

The Soledad Fire Department has been presenting a firemen's muster at the

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— Jesse Casillas, Soledad fire chief

Soledad Wine and Wind Festival since its inception three years ago.

They perform a series of competitive events such as an old-fashioned bucket brigade, which portrays the way that firefighting used to take place prior to hoses, pumps and apparatus.

"One of the fun things is that it's not uncommon to see spouses and families of fire personnel participating along with the firefighters," Casillas said.



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