

Mini-Muster

This is a program coordinated by the Historical Society of Palm Desert and supported by the Desert Sands School District and Riverside County Fire Department (Station 33) and the cities of Palm Desert and Indian Wells in which the third grades of all 5 elementary schools in these cities participate. The program also gets additional support from the Palm Desert Rotary. This program was begun in Palm Desert in 1993.

This is a full day program for the students. The exercise begins with class room preparation on fire history and fire safety. On the assigned day for each school the fire department brings several pieces of equipment on campus including everything from 'medic units' to 'ladder trucks.' Depending on the availability of staff, 10 to 13 stations are set up. At these stations the students learn about the different pieces of equipment present, how to react to and exit from a home fire, how to maneuver blindfolded, how to use a fire hose and fire extinguishers and so on. It is a fun and instructive day for all involved.

Following the outdoor activities and after lunch, the students assemble (muster) in the multi-purpose room where some question and answer activities occur. At this time they also meet Smokey the Bear. Probably most important, during this assembly, one or two firemen are outfitted in full gear, including breathing apparatus. The lights are turned out and the firemen crawl around among the students allowing the students to experience the sounds and sights that might be experienced in an actual fire. The object of this exercise is to expose the students to these strange sights and sounds, to understand that they are friendly sounds and not to hide from them if they are trapped in a fire.

As a follow up to the day's activities the students are encouraged to create a drawing of the mini-muster experience. These drawings are judged and one is selected from each school. The winning artists are presented to the respective city council and the art work is then hung at their nearest fire station for the ensuing year.