



STUART PALLEY For The Times
A SMALL number of experienced aviators operate aircraft like this one, dropping retardant on a Laguna Beach fire in 2018.

Pilots who fly toward the flames

For aerial firefighters, the grueling and sometimes deadly work is more than a job

By Jack Dolan

Diving toward a burning hillside in his first season flying an air tanker for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, Jeff Reynolds realized he was doing just about everything his early flight instructors warned him not to.

With the airplane’s hollow wings full of fuel and the belly full of fire retardant, he was “flying heavy” in hot, thin air. He was also going low and slow, simultaneously reducing the plane’s maneuverability while giving himself a razor-thin margin for error. And he was deliberately diving into smoke so thick he couldn’t see other aircraft or the terrain around him.

It all added up to “a disaster waiting to happen,” Reynolds recalled in a recent interview.

He was a little off target, so a controller told



JEFF REYNOLDS
CAL FIRE pilot Jeff Reynolds calls his work “a mission” and “a labor of love.”

him to go around and try again. Still burdened with about 1,000 gallons of fire retardant, he shoved the throttles forward to squeeze more power from the howling engines and pulled back on the controls to start an agonizingly slow climb.

That’s when he noticed an odd white shape at eye level out the windshield. It was a utility truck — at the same altitude as him — crawling along a hillside he did not expect to be there. The hair stood up on his forearms.

It was beginner’s luck, not skill, that saved him from slamming into that mountain, Reynolds said. The hillside was off to the right and he was already turning left. But that moment of shock still haunts him years later.

“I’ll hold on to that memory forever and ever,” Reynolds said with a shiver in his voice. We’ve all seen the dramatic news video: a

[See Pilots, A6]

As heat waves go, this one’s a sizzler

With triple-digit temperatures forecast in much of Southland, experts urge caution.

BY SUMMER LIN AND HANNAH FRY

A broiling heat wave is headed to Southern California this week, bringing what is expected to be the hottest temperatures of the summer to a region that has already endured stifling weather.

After a generally mild August across much of California, forecasters say a ridge of high pressure is expected to usher in temperatures 5 to 10 degrees higher than normal along the coast and as much as 20 degrees above normal in inland communities.

The most sweltering temperatures are anticipated to hit between Wednesday and Friday, said Mike Wofford, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Oxnard.

“We’re talking about a solid four days of heat,” Wofford said. “We’ve had three or four days of hot weather before, but this one is hotter and longer than most of the other heat waves we’ve had.”

Temperatures in the San Fernando Valley could reach between 110 and 115 degrees, while downtown Los Angeles is forecast to see temperatures in the mid- to high 90s. Burbank, Woodland Hills, Pasadena, Santa Clarita and Palm Springs could experience triple-digit temperatures.

The early September heat wave comes on the heels of what UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain predicts could go down as the hottest summer on record across much of California. Along the coast, it may not have felt scorching this summer, but it has been a different story across large swaths of the state.

“Most of California’s immediate coastline missed out on record heat this season (including some of the most densely populated portions of the SoCal megalopolis) — meaning that while a

[See Heat wave, A6]

How an overseas dispute intruded into Irvine home

U.S. prosecutors say a cop for hire helped force resident to sign over \$100 million to a Chinese mogul

BY MATTHEW ORMSETH, BRITTNY MEJIA AND KERI BLAKINGER

The job that Jing “Annie” Liu wanted done was not one for a lawyer.

The Chinese chemical magnate had spent seven years pursuing a man she once called her “most trusted secretary” across two continents.

In lawsuits filed in China and the United States, Liu claimed the former aide had stolen the equity from her companies while she served time in a Chinese prison. At issue was an estimated \$100 million.

The litigation was dragging into an eighth year when, in late 2018, Liu tapped out an email on her iPad to an Australian security consultant.

“I pay so much for the lawyers,” she wrote, according to an email disclosed in a civil case brought by her former aide. “But now I think [using] lawyers not smart

way to do it.”

Records and testimony in the Orange County Superior Court case show that, with her fortune hanging in the balance, the wealthy industrialist turned to a strange cast of men to find the resolution her attorneys could not.

One June morning five years ago, an active-duty L.A. County sheriff’s detective, two former deputies and two ex-soldiers showed up on the Irvine doorstep of Liu’s former secretary, Hao Wang.

In an indictment, federal prosecutors in Los Angeles allege the men forced Wang to sign over the disputed company shares after assaulting and threatening to deport him. The defendants, who turned themselves in Aug. 12, have pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiring to extort Wang and violate his civil rights. Liu has not been charged with any crimes.

The indictment does not

[See Irvine, A5]



BRIAN VAN DER BRUG Los Angeles Times
ROSIE KEISER, with curios in her Northridge home, says she “cried and shook” during her access pass screening. She called the questions “deeply personal.”

Park fans with disabilities angered by Disney changes

‘We had the worst day ever there,’ one mom says after her son was denied an access pass.

BY ANDREW J. CAMPA

Less than two hours after being dropped off at “The Most Magical Place on Earth,” Florida resident Paula Roland tearfully called her husband to take her and their son Noah

home.

That June 5 was supposed to be a once-in-a-lifetime experience at Disney World’s Magic Kingdom. But days earlier Noah — a non-verbal autistic child with sensory processing disorder — had been denied Disney’s Disability Access Service, or DAS, pass. The 8-year-old struggles to stand in line for more than 15 minutes, and the pass would have provided him with shorter wait times at attractions.

Shortly after entering

Disney World and attempting to wait in line with his family, Noah suffered an autistic meltdown — an involuntary and intensely emotional response to an overwhelming situation. He spent most of his time at the park being soothed by his mother inside a gift shop.

“It’s hard to come back from that point,” Roland said. “We had the worst day ever there.”

The child is among various individuals The Times

[See Disney parks, A9]

New challenges in Gaza talks

Both Israel’s government and Hamas signal hardened postures after the killings of six hostages. **WORLD, A3**

An L.A. future for Dudamel

Music director has plans for his last two years with Philharmonic — and beyond. **ENTERTAINMENT, E1**

Disney blackout on DirecTV

Over 10 million customers are swept up in contract feud. Here’s what you should know. **BUSINESS, A8**

Weather

Sunny and very warm. L.A. Basin: 93/72. **B6**

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