



How Dog Walkers and Progressive Dinner Parties Helped One Banner Mountain Neighborhood Become More Firesafe

By Ann Westling
Banner Mountain Resident and Volunteer with the Fire Safe Council

Dog Walkers

It all started with the dog walkers. At first we remembered the dogs' names more than the owners', but those daily meet-ups sparked friendships. Soon impromptu gatherings followed. One neighbor suggested a Progressive Christmas Dinner, and it was such a hit it became a tradition. Before long we added summer street parties and—thanks to Covid-era creativity—Easter parades and Halloween treks with kids, adults, and dogs all in costume.

Neighborhood Advisory Visits

Those social ties built trust, and that trust made it easier to talk about serious topics like fire safety. Around 2005, we organized our first neighborhood defensible-space advisory visit with the Fire Safe Council. Three homeowners volunteered their properties, and about 20 neighbors came to observe. At the time, most properties were thick with brush and trees of every size. Since then, with support from the Fire Safe Council, we've hosted additional advisory visits, used their chipping program to reduce brush, refined landscaping, removed many conifers and oaks, and tackled other projects together. Nothing builds camaraderie like hauling slash.

Social Connections Paved the Way for Fire Readiness

Our growing focus on safety led to creating evacuation drills, a fire-season readiness guide for the 'hood, and an emergency communication system. What began as a contact list for parties evolved into a reliable Signal emergency contact network that gets updated every year. And we're even expanding to include nearby neighborhoods.

During recent snowstorms—when trees fell across roads, power lines, driveways, and even onto a few homes—our system helped neighbors respond quickly and support one another, despite losing power and internet.

We've all come to rely on the amazing amount of knowledge and skill in the neighborhood. With neighbors who can organize a party one month and show up with chainsaws the next, we're steadily becoming more prepared for whatever comes our way—winter storms or, heaven forbid, summer fires. Thank goodness for our wonderful neighbors!!

For more information on establishing a Firewise Community that can help you develop these contacts and readiness in your 'hood, contact the Fire Safe Council (530) 446-1224 or Ann at annmwestling@gmail.com.