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## SPOTLIGHT: Nick Marinaro, '72

### 7,000 Incidents, No Cats

BY MARIE C. BACA

Nick Marinaro experienced some strange things over the course of his nearly 40-year career as a firefighter. There was the time in the late 1970s that a herd of horses escaped from a stable and began galloping down Page Mill Road. There were the hydrogen fires that would occasionally break out at SLAC, fires that burned so clear that the only way to detect them was to stick a broom out in front of you and wait until it ignited.



Courtesy Nick Marinaro

As Palo Alto's fire chief, Marinaro, who retired in

June with plans to do volunteer work, supervised the 126 employees who respond to some 7,000 incidents every year in Palo Alto, Stanford and some parts of unincorporated Santa Clara County. About a third of the calls come from the Farm, mostly reports of small fires and requests for medical aid.

Marinaro started this career as a student firefighter. (The campus and Palo Alto fire operations merged in 1976.) The 14 student firefighters—who, during Marinaro's time, included the first female student firefighter—earned \$150 a month during the school year and lived in the firehouse for free. Eight students were asked to stay on for the summer, when they earned \$750 a month. Those who worked during the school year and the summer were able to cover their full tuition via the program.

Marinaro was present for the end of student protests against the Vietnam War, when anyone in a uniform—firefighters included—might have rocks thrown at them. Now, "there's far more collaboration between the fire department and the campus, and we're often on-site to do emergency response training or some other type of education."

The technology is more sophisticated, too. To keep an eye on potential wildfires in the foothills, for example, a web camera constantly scans the area and streams video to the Internet. The camera can be zoomed in on smoky areas so that firefighters can be directed exactly to the scene. ([View](#) the area.)

It's a far cry from the days when Marinaro would use a fire truck ladder to rescue a cat from the fronds of a palm tree. "We eventually realized that we never found any cat skeletons in those trees," says Marinaro. "If they got hungry enough, they would find a way down."

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