

By Gary Giacomo

Trio of firefighters build a better roof prop

When you think about Sonoma County, probably the first thing that comes to mind is wine. After all, the bucolic area of Northern California routinely boasts of grape harvests of about 170,000 tons, exceeding neighboring Napa County's harvest by over 30 percent. However, three firefighters associated with the Sonoma Valley Fire and Rescue Authority have brought to market a patented product that has nothing to do with the wine industry, and everything to do with helping to insure that firefighters are well-trained and ready to respond.

The roof prop came to be back in 2001 when the Sonoma Fire Department set out to build a three-story drill tower. Captain Jeff Paganini started sketching an idea for a training prop that would offer not only realistic

training exercises for ventilation cuts at a variety of pitches, but do so in a safely controlled environment. Paganini shared his idea with Jim Barreto, a volunteer engineer with the department who also happened to manage a custom metal fabrication shop. Through the course of a year the men refined the design. Once the prop was working and installed at the top of Sonoma Valley Fire & Rescue Authority's drill tower, they invited Paganini's cousin Nick Greben, himself a 30-year veteran of the Oakland Fire Department and who is now a Board member with the Authority, to see the prop.

"When I saw this," recalls Greben, "I remember telling Jeff, 'if fire departments see this, they are going to want this.'" Soon after Greben joined with his cousin to form JNJ Roof Prop. Before long fire departments in the local

area did see the prop, and as Greben had predicted, they wanted one of their own. South of Sonoma the Schell-Vista Fire District requested one. The free-standing unit located behind the main fire house, incorporates hooks on the backside of the prop to allow for hose drying – a feature that is now offered as an optional, non-training function for the prop.

The prop easily simulates different roof pitches and can be mounted on a drill tower roof as it is in Sonoma, against a flat wall, or even in a parking lot with support poles. The popular free-standing units are available in 10 foot tall by either 12, 14 or 16 foot wide configurations. Although roof ops is the prop's main use, it can also be used for wall breaching or bailout exercises. The rafters are easily changed, and the patented design in-



Left to right, Nick Greben, Jeff Paganini and Jim Barreto in front of one of the company's props located behind the fire station at Schell Vista Fire Department.

cludes a winch and pulley system to change the pinch.

Company founder Paganini is properly excited about the prop, and can excitedly recite its many uses and operation, but he humbly explains, "I am not a salesman, but firefighters see this, and then they want one."

In a testament to the marketing power of the Internet, there are JNJ Roof Props now in use by departments in Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia and Wyoming and even one unit at a department in Alberta, Canada. Here in the Golden State, Cal Fire has installed three at the Lone Academy, and another handful of California departments and the Cal Fire station in Santa Rosa have them as well.

When asked about how they came to have these units shipped all over the United States, Paganini says simply, "the internet". He surmises that fire departments Googled 'roof prop' and the JNJ invention would show up. With no sales force (a situation that will shortly change, as L.N. Curtis & Sons will be adding the prop to their catalog) word-of-mouth and internet inquiries have kept the three-person shop busy filling orders and offering personalized and custom service.

Customers have nothing but praise for the Sonoma-bred invention.



The prop is adjustable to a variety of angles, allowing for roof operation/ventilation training at a variety of pitches.

Assistant Chief Vince Pratt of West Webster Fire District in New York says, "Having a roster of 125 firefighters, makes it a logistical nightmare when trying to offer off-site, hands-on training evolutions. We no longer need to take an apparatus out of service, and can now offer high-quality training on-site. Our new roof prop gives us the freedom to train our personnel at our convenience. Easy to assemble, great customer support, coupled with a high-quality product made this purchase one of the smartest our training department has made. I would recommend this product in a heartbeat!"

Closer to home Captain Dan Pierce of the Glen Ellen Fire Department in Sonoma County says, "Having had our roof prop for several years now, it has turned out to be one of the best training investments we have made. Ventilation is difficult to realistically train on, as acquired structures become more scarce. The prop solves this issue and has become a regional training tool that allows more of our neighboring departments to train together using the same standards. We



Adjusting the prop at a 90 degree angle, with a window cutout, allows for simple bail-out exercises. Some agencies, strapped for space and with the prop positioned in this angle during hose drying rack adding yet another use to the prop.

also use it for forced entry, firefighter survival and RIC training to name a few. It is only limited by the user's imagination."

"We did not really set out to make

If you want more information on the JNJ Roof Prop visit www.roofprop.com or contact them at (415) 330-9000 or email at info@roofprop.com. Soon the JNJ Roof Prop will be available for purchase through L.N. Curtis & Sons. Find them at www.Incurtis.com.

this a full-time job," say Paganini, "but we can see there is demand for the prop, and now we will see where it goes."

In the meantime, Barreto keeps busy volunteering with the Fire Authority. Paganini, when not on-duty as a fire captain, tends to the family's small cattle herd, (after a detour in agriculture that included a stint raising ostriches). And Greben tends to his grapes at Grebennikoff Vineyards, his retirement hobby in the Sonoma Valley. However, as their JNJ Roof Prop gains wider exposure, these three men may find other pursuits will take a backseat to filling orders from interested fire departments. 🇺🇸



With new sheetrock or plywood the prop is easily prepared for a new training evolution.