



## **Santa Barbara County Sheriff – Fire Air Support Unit NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

The Santa Barbara County Sheriff-Fire Air Support Unit (ASU) is pleased to announce the arrival of Copter 964, a 2004 Sikorsky HH-60L “Firehawk” helicopter. Since its purchase in 2019, the Firehawk has been stationed in Alabama, where it has undergone a retrofit with all-new state-of-the-art avionics, paint, and a new rescue hoist. In addition to the upgrades, while in Alabama, the Firehawk was tested, certified and transformed from a military grade helicopter to a helicopter configured to meet the missions of public safety for the citizens of Santa Barbara County.

The Firehawk will join an already working fleet of medium-sized Bell Huey aircraft stationed out of the Santa Ynez Airport. In addition to increased stability when flying in high winds and being outfitted with top of the line night-flying equipment, Copter 964 brings a significant increase in working capacity for the ASU. The Firehawk significantly increases lift capacity which ensures that more water can be delivered faster and more accurately on fires, thereby helping to limit fire spread, associated impacts and costs. The Firehawk can deliver approximately 1,000 gallons of water in one drop, compared to 300 gallons for the Huey.

The Firehawk can also carry 12 passengers, including two critically injured patients, as compared to five passengers and one critically injured patient on the Huey. Additionally, the top speed of the Firehawk is 218 mph, compared to 138 mph for the Huey, allowing quicker response times to incidents and faster turnaround times from refueling and refilling with water.

The Blackhawk helicopter will make its final conversion into becoming a Firehawk with the installation of a fixed belly tank to carry and disperse water for firefighting purposes. The fixed tank requires modifying the landing gear of the Blackhawk to raise the aircraft in order to accommodate a 1,000-gallon tank. A helicopter with a belly tank can drop off ground crews of firefighters at a fire and immediately attack the flames, whereas a helicopter with a bucket attached cannot move crews around and thus would have to return to a staging area, after dropping off the firefighters, to attach the bucket and return to the fire front.

This tank is unique from any other option in that it allows our aircraft to maintain their multi-mission capability in firefighting, hoist rescue, and medical evacuations without the need for any

reconfigurations. It also allows the helicopter to be filled while on the ground, the standard practice for nighttime firefighting operations.

We would like to acknowledge the dedicated fundraising efforts of Direct Relief International (DRI) that resulted in raising a total donation of \$1,151,000. The generous donation was used to offset the cost of the retrofit.

The Firehawk is expected to be operationally ready to respond to fire-related missions in Fall 2021, after focused training has been completed for the pilots, mechanics and other ASU staff, and the belly tank has been added.

The Santa Barbara County Fire Department and Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Office are excited to have the Firehawk join the fleet at the Santa Barbara County Sheriff-Fire Air Support Unit.

The media will be invited to an introduction at a later date.

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