

## **SCA President's and Piper Award: Alexander DeGeorgey, Michael Newland, Natalie Brodie, and the Institute for Canine Forensics**

By Rebecca Allen

I first met Piper, a beautiful border collie, in the bookroom of the Society for California Archaeology. As I sat at a table adjacent to the Institute for Canine Forensics, the space next to my feet when the room became too much was a place of refuge for Piper. I also learned about how highly trained detection canines are used to locate burials of Native American ancestors and historic cemeteries. Partnering with these extraordinary dogs and their handlers provides archaeologists with another line of evidence in our search for human remains, and helps our profession identify cemeteries of great import to descendant communities.

In 2017, California began to experience a series of devastating fires that destroyed homes, lives, and negatively affected communities in ways that I can still not begin to imagine. For some of those who survived these fires, one of the hardest losses was that the cremated remains (cremains) of loved ones that could not be retrieved in time as people were forced to run for their lives from the oncoming flames. Rather than leave loved ones behind, following the destruction, archaeologists and canine handlers came together in a way that has garnered much media and professional attention. This completely volunteer effort has been featured in newspapers, popular archaeological magazines, television, and radio. This effort has also shown archaeology in a positive and important light, one in which has immediate relevance for fire survivors, and captures the imagination of the public. It is exhausting work, and takes a toll on the canines, their handlers, and the archaeologists.

In a radio perspective for KQED, Michael Newland described the exhaustion and the reward: "One of the dogs, Piper, a little border collie, came over to her and dropped her head in Kim's lap to be petted, one professional comforting another after one of the hardest and most moving days of our careers." The President's Award is given for above and beyond service to California archaeology. I feel privileged to bestow this award this inspiring group of volunteers (with Piper's assistance).

Photo: ICF's Lynne Engelbert and Piper among the ashes (Photo by Federica Armstrong courtesy of ICF)