

East Fork Fire Protection District

OFFICIAL PRESS RELEASE

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Volunteer Recruitment Is Up, But Not In All Areas

Minden – The East Fork Fire Protection District has been working hard to recruit new volunteer firefighters under its recently modified and redirected volunteer program. The new program, which was implemented over a year ago, places greater emphasis on volunteer personnel assuming logistical roles rather than the front line firefighter rolls of the past. With the exception of wildland firefighting, volunteers are now being trained to provide logistical support at larger incidents. The demands placed on an all hazard volunteer are simply too much to ask of anyone. Over time, that roll has been transitioned to career employees. While the District's efforts have borne fruit in several areas of the 650 square miles of the district, some areas are in critical need of additional volunteers. **Areas, such as, Sheridan, Ruhenstroth and Genoa are at a critical point.** Other areas are doing better, such as Fish Springs, Johnson Lane, Gardnerville, and even the Topaz Lake. All have seen increases in volunteer participation. The District's volunteer numbers have risen from 34 two years ago, to just over 60 currently, including 8 new recruits in the current fall logistical training. The recent fire in the Sheridan area, off Indian Trails, in which a home was lost due to fall yard clean up burn, served as an example of the need for volunteers in that area. All three of the remaining Sheridan volunteers responded and worked side by side with career forces and volunteers from other areas to control the fire. Initial responders were on the scene within 16 minutes of the dispatch. District Chief, Tod Carlini stated, ***"Just because you may live near a fire station, especially our volunteer stations, doesn't mean that our response times are going to be within minutes. Our volunteers are very dedicated to their work, but it is an unrealistic expectation that volunteers are always going to be available."*** All of the District's volunteer stations have signs posted notifying the public that the station is a "volunteer" station and not staffed. While the community likes to embrace the concept of a volunteer fire department, augmented by strategically located career personnel, the reality is that we rely more and more on career forces for the bulk of the firefighting effort, especially structural firefighting. Almost all of our emergency medical responses are provided by career employees. ***"It is very difficult for a volunteer to acquire the necessary training in the field of EMS and then to be able to make the necessary calls which would afford experience."*** noted Deputy Chief Dave Fogerson. Volunteers are dispatched to all cardiac arrest calls in the district, in hopes that the closest responders are available to respond. Chief Carlini stated, ***"With requests for service on the rise at a rate now of about 2.5% to 3% per year and a lack of volunteers, the district will continue to need additional career personnel."*** The District Board recently approved six (6) new positions. Those

personnel plus five (5) others hired to filled vacant positions due to retirements are currently in the Regional Fire Academy and won't be ready for fulltime assignment until January 7, 2019. (See related story)

The other consideration that must be made is the fact that the district is geographically challenged and people living in the rural areas of the core response zones must accept some of the risk for the choice to live in those areas and that response times can be extended. In the Indian Trails incident, the location of the fire was 7.7 miles away from the closet career station, or approximately 13 minutes driving time. The District's documented response time from the time of dispatch was 16 minutes.

Deputy Chief / Fire Marshal Steve Eisele noted that wildland fire is perhaps the largest challenge that the District faces on an almost year-around basis now and encourage residents in the urban interface areas to practice defensible space and to remove juniper trees which are next to homes. The district has been working with several local residents to develop Community Wildland Fire Protection Plans (CWPP's). These plans will allow the District and community groups to apply for funding to assist with neighborhood clean-up, compost combustible programs, and overall fuels mitigation projects. Sheridan area residents Peggy Ristorcelli (Sheridan Acres) and Lyda Hayes (Jobe's Peak Ranch) have been and continue to be champions of this effort for those areas as examples. The District hopes to move forward, working with Douglas County, on the adoption of the Urban Interface Code in 2019.

District Chief Tod Carlini went on to say that at this time, the rumors regarding the closure of the Sheridan Fire Station are false, however, volunteers are needed. Efforts are underway via some concerned citizens in the area to work with the District and the remaining volunteers to see if additional volunteers can be recruited and trained. Sheridan Volunteers responded to 37 calls last year. Chief Carlini, stated that, **"A volunteer fire station is only as viable as its volunteer membership. It takes dedicated and trained volunteers to make it work and people in the community willing dedicate themselves to volunteering."** Speaking of dedication, Sheridan volunteers, Margaret Biggs, Nate Leising and Les Hodgson, have been volunteering from 40 years, to 30 years, to 25 years respectively, and are still committed to seeing the Station remain viable and available, for the time being, but new volunteers are needed. Sheridan area residents will be hosting a "pot luck" affair on December 2, 2018 at the Sheridan Fire Station at 3:00 PM. The purpose of the gathering is solely to recruit those interested in serving as volunteers. Information and presentations will be made at that time about what it takes to be a productive volunteer. Anyone interested in volunteering in the Sheridan Area or anywhere in the East Fork jurisdiction can also contact the East Fork Fire Protection District at 775-782-9040 or visit the East Fork website at eastforkfire.org. The application period is open year around and training is provided twice a year. The next logistical volunteer training will be sometime between February and April of 2019 with wildland fire training being conducted in May of 2019.