

## Black Forest fire department: a few changes

Bryan Jack, the fire chief of the Black Forest Fire Rescue Protection District, said the biggest change since the Black Forest fire of 2013 is that support among agencies has strengthened.

"Historically, we could expect to be able to utilize 10 resources," Jack said. "With the Hanover, Colorado, fire; 60 resources were available from the county. There is a mutual aid cooperation that has been going on since the 2013 fire. We are part of the North Group, which is a cooperative, automatic response group between seven agencies. We all get the call at the same time, and we all respond at the same time."

Another change since the 2013 fire has been the partnership with Black Forest Together to update the original wildfire protection plan, completed in 2007. A new plan, the Black Forest Community Wildfire Protection Plan, involved community input and was implemented in August 2017.

Jack said they are also proactive when it comes to finances for the district. "We know our funding comes primarily through property taxes we levy, and we have worked hard to pay off our debts five years early to save the taxpayers money," he said.

Impact fees would also help fund the district, Jack said. Since 2015, Colorado House Bill 1088 allowed entities to collect impact fees; however, Jack said impact fees are not yet on the table in El Paso County.

"There are three things a fire department needs to run efficiently: facilities, people and equipment," Jack said. "We are pretty lucky because our facilities and equipment are fairly new and in good shape." Black Forest has two fire stations, with four full-time firefighters and one part-time firefighter on active duty every day. Jack said they are planning to add a sixth firefighter through a grant process. During high-fire danger days, they have a recall and two additional staff members available to patrol. About 20 fully certified and qualified volunteer firefighters are on board as well.

The department offers other services to the community. On June 18, the fire department held a Black Forest/Falcon Neighborhood Wildfire Workshop. On July 14, the department will host its annual open house at Station 1, with live vehicle extrication demonstrations, medical helicopters and refreshments donated by UC Health and Penrose-St Francis. The event starts at 10 a.m. at 11445 Teachout Road.

Jack said it is important to remind the community to "continue to mitigate; start if you haven't started; keep going if you already started."

For more information, visit <http://bffire.org>.



The statue and plaque is a tribute to wildland firefighters; it stands outside Black Forest Fire Station 1. Photo by Leslie