

Editorial: Black Forest Fire Department

Where we Started and Five Years later

As an elected Black Forest Fire Rescue Board member for the past five years, I have seen and been a part of major changes in our fire department and the community. Working with our new Fire Chief (Bryan Jack), department officers, firefighters (paid and volunteer), and devoted community members, we are moving forward from the devastation that fell upon Black Forest.

On the financial side, with outstanding treasurers on the fire board, past and present (Jayme McConnellogue and Jack Hinton), we have a budget that has produced positive reserves. This has enabled us to assist and complete projects in many areas, for example: purchase of new firefighting equipment for the station and vehicles, purchase of new medical equipment for the ambulances, purchase of a new brush truck and utility vehicle (with snowplow}, and a new fire engine which will be delivered in 2019. We have also made upgrades to the fire stations. The bulk of our financial savings and reserves have been utilized to retire numerous district debts, in the past year we have paid off Station #2, an ambulance, water tender and a fire engine. All of these debts were paid off five years early which saved the district taxpayers thousands of dollars in interest payments. Additionally, we were able to hire a fourth firefighter per shift this year, this moves us closer to our full-time staffing goal.

From a cooperation standpoint we have implemented a rapid automatic response system that has multiple agencies responding to emergencies at the first sound of the alarm. We have improved communications, transparency and citizen support through numerous programs, such as firewise assessments, mitigation projects, and public education outreach. To accomplish this we have partnered with Black Forest Together and created a separate local cooperator group. The cooperator group is available to assist the Fire Chief during emergencies with specialized equipment, and could be utilized during wildland fires, flooding, blizzards or any other significant event. Furthermore, we have implemented a peer support group and a Chaplin program (with assistance from CSFD), to aide both the fire department and the community. Lastly, we have strengthened our working relationships with all local fire departments, the El Paso County Sheriff's Office, the local Home Builders Association and the El Paso County Board of County Commissioners.

This is just a small sample of accomplishments within your fire department and community that has happened in the last five years. With thousands of hours of fire and medical training, our department is showing what can arise from the ashes of a terrible wildland fire in a short period of time. Our firefighters are getting the support they need so they can face any future emergency. I am proud to work for our community and our fire department, alongside the rest of our hardworking board members: PJ Langmaid (Chairman), Rick McMorrان (Vice Chair), Jack Hinton (Treasurer), Dave Hoffpauir (Member).

Rick Nearhoof

Black Forest Fire Rescue Board Member