



Above: Newly certified paramedic Valerie Marshall, left, is congratulated by her dad, Tom Marshall, and Board Chairman Scott Campbell, right, after her swearing-in ceremony on Feb. 19. She said, "This is what I started on the Fire Department for, and now I'm here, 10 years later. Thank you everybody so much. I love all you guys, and thank you for this opportunity." Photo by Lisa Hatfield.

handled for El Paso County. Since 1979, the EMS contract for the county has been held by American Medical Response (AMR). However, the Colorado Springs Fire Department is considering "getting into the ambulance business," said Burns. "It may cause a big shift in how we work our EMS transport."

One of many concerns Burns stated about this possible change is that it might make the county Emergency Services Authority (ESA) "disappear." ESA is the ambulance service regulatory authority in the county. That might mean appointing a new county commissioner and City Council member, he said, implying the need for some kind of oversight. "It could cause a whole cascade of things to happen," Burns said. "The county commissioners are very, very unhappy with what's going on."

AMR's current contract expires in June 2014, and after that, the rate structure could become "exorbitantly higher" for people outside the city limits, Burns said. Alternatively, with multiple bidders, some rates could go down due to competition, he said.

"The last thing I want to do if this really does happen that way is get in the ambulance business," Burns said, adding that, "EMS transport is a (revenue) losing business." He wouldn't speculate about why the city's Fire Department is proposing this change. Assistant Chief Scott Ridings said, "They won't disclose information even after being asked by the county commissioners and ESA board."

Campbell mentioned another possible complication if AMR kept the county part of the contract but Colorado Springs got another EMS provider. "The city (dispatch) system is not designed for multiple medical responders. It's only designed for one contract."

Burns said he will be watching the situation closely.

Ridings proposed that the board purchase new station alert software for Stations 1 and 2 so that calls could be

dispatched by unit instead of by fire department. Currently, a crew member needs to "sit up all night listening to the radio," which disturbs the work/rest ratio, and alerts meant for one station are also sent to the other station unnecessarily.

The new system would cost about \$15,000. It would select the speakers necessary to alert the individuals that are being dispatched for a particular kind of run. "I'm recommending a good system for what we do for our call volume and for what we do," Ridings said. "We could install it ourselves."

Ridings said this new type of system "is the very standard practice in every fire house across the country except for El Paso County," but he expects the county to start dispatching this way. "By trying it out here, the way we're dispatching to Wescott and Tri-Lakes at this point will be the county standard, I guarantee you." He said this system is affordable to most fire departments.

The board members discussed which line item in the budget could be used to pay for this new station alert system. A motion to authorize up to \$16,000 passed unanimously.

Ridings said the total of 185 calls in January was 33 percent higher than in January 2012, due to more AMR runs, more "good intent" calls, and more calls cancelled by dispatch while en route. He said about 94 percent of in-district, non-AMR calls took less than eight minutes for response.

Finance report

Administrative Assistant Cheryl Marshall reported that she had received the last wildland income expected from the Hewlett Fire, but she advised waiting until March to approve the final end of year 2012 financial statements so that she could account for any last-minute bills for 2012.

For 2012, net income was about \$2 million and net expenses were about \$1.8 million. A total of 97 percent of the budget was expended, and 23 percent of the reserves designated were expended, "mostly for building Station 2," Marshall said.

Campbell commented on the opportunities presented by sending crews to other wildland fires. "It's great that we can do that and use the equipment and skills, and it's great training of course, and certainly valuable from a help perspective on all the fires. I know we had lots of opportunity last year to help out."

Director Harland Baker suggested applying the roughly \$187,000 surplus from 2012 against debt for Station 2. "The idea is to free up ongoing expense so you could turn it into hiring people." Marshall said Wells Fargo would also be willing to negotiate a new loan package, and board members agreed to discuss these ideas further after the official 2012 audit is done.

Marshall said that she's almost through making the arrangements to move the district's banking accounts to Wells Fargo.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:59 p.m.

The next meeting will be held at 7 p.m. on March 19 at Station 1, 15415 Gleneagle Drive. Meetings are normally

held on the third Tuesday of the month. Information: 488-8680.

Lisa Hatfield can be reached at lisahatfield@ocn.me.

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Lewis-Palmer School District 38 Board of Education, Feb. 21

Growth in student numbers expected to continue

By Harriet Halbig

At the Feb. 21 meeting of the District 38 Board of Education, Assistant Superintendent Cheryl Wangeman reported that the student count for the district is expected to continue to grow, although at a slower rate than this year. A variable in the count is the increased rate of residential construction in the district, which could bring in new families and students. Also, the construction could increase the district's access to cash in lieu of land, a provision that allows the district to access funds if a new school building is not required.

The cost of health insurance for district employees is anticipated to increase by about 6 percent. Wangeman recommended that the district absorb the increase rather than requiring employees to decrease coverage to maintain cost. The impact of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) is unknown. It is certain that an employee who works 30 or more hours a week must be offered coverage. The state insurance exchange is already in place.

Wangeman recommended funding replacement of antiquated equipment in the Nutritional Services Department. She said that the district acknowledges and appreciates the success of the department in returning funds to the district as a result of its careful planning.

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