

Donald Wescott Fire Protection District, Sept. 15

Wescott swears in new firefighter

By Jennifer Green-Lanchoney

Donald Wescott Fire Protection District's newest permanent firefighter, Robert Mulroney-Hurd, was sworn in during the Board of Directors meeting Sept. 15. Mulroney-Hurd, who began as a volunteer firefighter, now joins 12 other paid firefighters on the Wescott team.

District Directors Bo McAllister, Harland Baker, Greg Gent and Joyce Hartung were present at the swearing in, as was the executive staff, Chief Vinny Burns and Assistant Chief Scott Ridings. District Director John Fredell was absent.

Annual training event

Station Capt. Sean Pearson led a team of five firefighters to train at the Nassau County Fire Service Training Academy in New York during the last week of June. This was the first out-of-state training exercise for both Wescott and the training academy. Pearson stated that the training event was a huge success, helping firefighters better fight many types of fires with props such as a burn buildings and vehicles. The education was unlike anything they could have received in Colorado, said Pearson. He added that after every burn cycle firefighters discussed their approach, indicating strengths and weaknesses and greatly enhancing firefighting knowledge.

Because the station would like to make

this an annual event, Wescott has allocated \$51,000 in the projected 2016 training budget. This is a more than 50 percent increase over the amount budgeted for 2015. Another Wescott group is scheduled to go back to the training academy this year.

Administrative

Stacey Popovich, Wescott administrative assistant, explained the current state of financial affairs for the Wescott fire district. The district currently has \$1.538 million in total funds. The financial statement was approved unanimously. The August meeting minutes were approved unanimously as well.

Chief's report

Assistant Chief Ridings gave the August run report, indicating a 30 percent increase in the number of calls received in 2015 over 2014. There were two grassfires and one vehicle fire that resulted in no damage.

2016 budget

Chief Burns brought the proposed 2016 budget to the board for review and approval. Of note, the tax assessor raised the station's valuation, which comes to the station in the form of a Special Ownership Tax, to \$175,000. This is a \$20,000 increase over the 2015 tax assessment. With an expected increase in tax revenue and other income, the station expects almost \$200,000 in additional funds during 2016.

Burns explained that the additional funds will be used to increase proposed budgets for wildland equipment and gear, salaries, training, and medical benefits. Salaries are expected to increase 7 percent across the board.

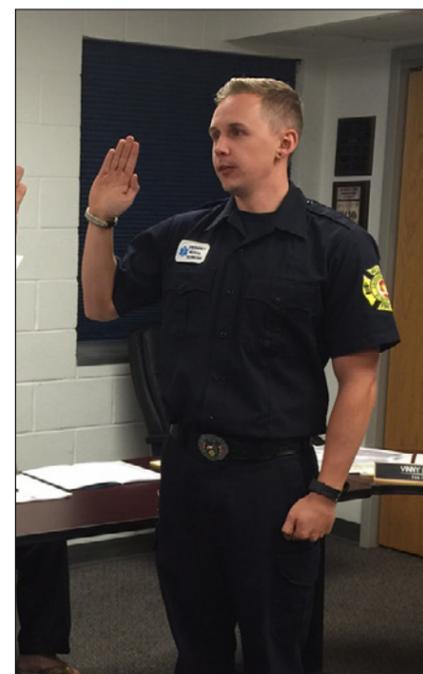
Popovich also explained the increase in medical benefit costs. Their previous plan at Rocky Mountain Insurance was increased by \$36,000 annually. Popovich began to research other options for the district, choosing the Colorado HealthOp Bison Plan. The Bison Plan increased the cost of medical insurance by \$2,400 over last year.

The board requested time to look over the proposed budget, and will re-engage at the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

The Donald Wescott Fire Protection District Board of Directors' next meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. Oct. 20 at Station 1, 15415 Gleneagle Dr. Please call 488-8680, a non-emergency number, for more information, or visit www.wescottfire.org. The district is also on Facebook.

Jennifer Green-Lanchoney can be contacted at jengreenlanchoney@ocn.me.



Above: District Director Greg Gent swears in firefighter Robert Mulroney-Hurd during a Wescott Fire Protection District Board of Directors meeting Sept. 15. Mulroney-Hurd began as a volunteer firefighter and now joins 12 other paid firefighters on the Wescott team. Photo provided by Jennifer Green-Lanchoney.

Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District, Sept. 23

2016 draft budget presented; one vacant firefighter position filled

By Lisa Hatfield

The directors of the Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District discussed the 2015 amended budget, the 2016 draft budget, and approved filling one vacant firefighter position at the Sept. 23 meeting. Franz Hankins was promoted to lieutenant.

President Jake Shirk and Vice President Roger Lance were excused. Secretary Mike Smaldino chaired the meeting.

Promotion ceremony

Fire Chief Chris Truty swore-in Lt. Hankins, who was promoted from firefighter engineer. Hankins' son Dylan pinned on his father's new badge.

2015 budget amendments discussed

Truty explained that as usual, there were unanticipated changes in expenses and revenues for the 2015 budget. He summarized by saying that budget revenue for

2015 would probably change from \$5.2 million to \$5.7 million. He said total expenses would change from \$5.1 million to \$5.5 million, which would increase the district's net position for the budget year by \$165,000.

The directors will have a public hearing and vote on the amended 2015 budget at the Oct. 28 meeting.

Truty said that property tax assessment values increased 7.9 percent in 2015, but this was short of hoped-for growth. Re-assessments will not be done again until 2017.

One firefighter position filled

Smaldino raised a question about staffing that related to the 2016 budget, which will not be finally approved until December. One of the district's goals is to gradually increase staffing to levels that meet national standards, as Truty has said in the past.

See www.ocn.me/v15n4.htm#tlmfpd0325.

Because the district had a budget surplus for 2015, Smaldino wondered if the district could begin the hiring process for one new firefighter at this meeting instead of waiting until after the 2016 budget was approved. Hiring one new firefighter would offset some overtime expenses incurred now due to minimum staffing requirements, Truty said.

The directors conducted a lengthy discussion of the risks and implications of the decision. The primary concern was that the board would be committing money to an expense that was not yet approved for 2016, although all indications were that the board would approve the 2016 staffing plan that Truty was suggesting, including adding this one new firefighter.

The directors voted unanimously to offer a job to one of the candidates that Deputy Chief Randy Trost had recom-

mended. It would still take 30-60 days for the new firefighter to actually join the district as he still would have to finish the qualification process.

2016 draft budget presented

Truty outlined many choices to be made regarding the 2016 budget in the areas of the operating fund, capital improvements, impact fees, and emergency reserves funds.

The 2016 operating budget was drafted at 7 percent above 2015 budget, or \$5.5 million. He said staffing and achieving average wages were the most significant issues, but the district is also making decisions about long-term funding goals, short- and long-term capital replacement plans, and enhanced public safety.

Truty said the main objective for the 2016 budget was to address two competing district goals: increasing staffing and making a significant effort toward improving staff wages, which currently are about 20 percent below average for comparable districts. He said the overwhelming choice of the union would be to improve current wages instead of increasing staffing. The goal was to increase the firefighter base wage by 8 percent starting in 2016. Because of the formula approved at the August meeting, this would mean increases between 1 percent and 20 percent for all staff depending on rank and longevity. See www.ocn.me/v15n9.htm#tlmfpd0826.

He said that the 2016 budget year would have enough funds to cover the restoration of the third firefighter by filling one of the three vacant positions at Station 2, with hopes of filling the last two vacant positions by 2018.

For detailed figures, contact the district, and attend the next several TLMFPD meetings: Wednesday Oct. 28, Tuesday Nov. 17, and Tuesday Dec. 8.

Financial report

Treasurer John Hildebrandt reported that



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