

Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District, June 24

New director appointed; mill levy discussion postponed

By Lisa Hatfield

At the June 24 meeting of the Tri-Lakes Monument Fire Protection District (TLM-FPD) board, one director was honored and another appointed, and a new battalion chief was sworn in. Fire Chief Chris Truty proposed a postponement in the discussion about mill levy override possibilities.

Treasurer John Hildebrandt and Secretary Mike Smaldino were excused.

Appreciation and swearing-in

President Jake Shirk presented departing Director Bruce Fritzsche with a plaque honoring his five years of service on the board. Fritzsche said, "I think in the big picture, things are going very well, and we are moving in the right direction. The support you all give to your leaders within the Fire Department as well as the board is very significant."

Truty swore in new Battalion Chief Michael Keough, while his two boys Da-

vid and Thomas stood close by, and his wife Andrea pinned on his new badge. "We are looking forward to what your contribution can be," Truty said.

New director Tharnish appointed

The board heard presentations from two candidates to fill the position vacated by Fritzsche.

Tom Tharnish said he had worked for the U.S. Navy, was a nuclear power plant operator, and has worked for the Town of Monument for 15 years, the last three as public works director. He said that his diverse expertise including knowledge of water issues could be a benefit to the district, especially regarding well issues at Station 1. He lives in the Pioneer Lookout Water District directly across the road from Station 1. He said the town is aware of Station 1's well issues, and the water district he is in "is in a position where they may be of some assistance." He said that he might need to abstain from certain votes regarding legal or government issues that involved the Town of Monument to avoid conflict of interest.

Jason Buckingham said he had extensive experience in fire service, serving four departments in 22 years, and was currently a lieutenant in the Colorado Springs Fire Department. He wanted to volunteer his time and share his background with the community of Monument. He said he did not have as much knowledge of boards and budgets,

but he was willing to learn.

The directors did not ask additional questions of either candidate. A third potential candidate, Samuel Stephens, did not attend the meeting. A fourth potential candidate who had submitted a letter of intent was out of town for the June 24 meeting. Four other people had expressed interest but had not submitted letters of intent.

Tharnish was appointed to the board by vote of 4-0. If the board had not voted unanimously with four votes tonight to achieve a majority of the overall board of six, all the candidates would have been invited to special meeting for the vote. Regular board elections will be held in May 2016.

Potential mill levy vote decision delayed; community advisory board recommended

Truty said that over the past months, the discussion of projected revenues and expenditures for capital projects and operations indicate annual shortfalls from \$2.1 million to \$3.5 million per year, including annual budget increases but excluding a training center.

He said the total mill levy increase required to cover all the projected costs could be from 4.5 to almost 9 mills with an average of about 6.75 mills. The current mill levy is 11.5, and he said the staff mill levy committee did not believe that that level of increase would be acceptable to the public, "at least without extensive dialogue with the community."

Truty's report said "three levy questions are options: bond, mill or both. Bond levies, which can be used for capital (tan-

gible) equipment, have a higher likelihood of passage and a sunset provision. Mill levies, which are required for operations, do not typically have a sunset, (although it can be added) and are often more difficult to pass. The committee is unanimously leaning towards a bond levy."

Truty and Battalion Chief Jamey Bumgarner recommended that the board evaluate the use of a consultant that specializes in guiding the district through the community polling, forming a citizen advisory board, evaluating mill levy rates, and other ballot measure processes. Bumgarner has worked with a consultant for this purpose at the Larkspur Fire Protection District.

The citizen advisory committee would be recruited from among actively involved community leaders in the Chamber of Commerce, homeowners associations, the Tri-Lakes Economic Development Corp, and other organizations in order to solicit community feedback about the district's request, Truty said.

The board consensus was to solicit bids from consultants and to postpone the levy ballot question to May 2016, when the district already planned to conduct a board member election. Elections cost the district \$30,000 to \$35,000 each, Truty said.

Financial report

Accountant Frances Esty presented the financial report as of May 31. She said at 41 percent of the year, expenses were 1 percent under budget, and revenues were on track. The district's cash position was \$3.2 million in five different accounts.

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Welcomes



Alexis Michopoulos, DO
Family Practice

Dr. Michopoulos, a Colorado Springs native, is board-certified in family medicine. She received her undergraduate degree in biology from the University of Denver in 2005 and her Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree from Rocky Vista University College of Osteopathic Medicine in 2012. She completed her residency at Southern Colorado Family Medicine in Pueblo in 2015. Her specialties include preventive medicine and wellness, Osteopathic Manipulative Therapy and working with athletes. In her free time she enjoys cooking, music and outdoor activities.

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