

Aeneas Valley Fire District Newsletter

September 2008

This newsletter is an unofficial publication whose intent is to communicate with and inform the public on items of general interest. Every effort is made to insure the accuracy of the content, but if discrepancies occur between official paperwork and this newsletter then use the official source first.

This newsletter is the kickoff of what we hope will be a regular and informative series of communications about what is going on within the district and answers to questions submitted to us by the general public. It will be a work in progress while we try to figure out the best style of communication with help and feedback from our readers. We start out with a short wrap up of things that have happened this year.

So far in 2008:

- We have responded to **23** incidents so far this year. Some callouts came from Okanogan dispatch, others from people calling in, and a number were internally directed (i.e. smoke sightings, lightning patrols).
- On a high financial level our first half year tax revenue was about \$10,000 while we happily exceeded even our best expectations by earning a little over \$21,000 for services rendered on the Cayuse Mountain fire. This brings our 2 year revenue so far to around \$10,000 from taxes and \$31,000 in earned income. In other words over 75% of our total income was NOT from taxes but from the hard work of our volunteer firefighters.
- The district entered service this year with two type 6 wildland engines. We leased a 3,000 gallon water tender from Tim Kenyon for \$1/year, which then earned about \$11,000 on the Cayuse Mountain fire. The district then purchased two vehicles. First was a type 2 structure engine, a 1985 Ford F800 chassis with a Grumman service body, 750 gallon water tank and a 750 GPM pump (a real honest **red** big city fire truck). It's now in active service as E1611 (page 3). The second vehicle, a 1992 Ford F-350 crew cab, is being converted into our third type 6 brush engine (B1613) and should be completed within a month or so. In addition 3 vehicles were donated to the district. The first is a 1989 Ford E-350XL van configured as a medical aid unit (page 3). We'll put this into active service when the trained personnel are in place and there is sufficient money to equip it. The last two donated vehicles are 2 ½ ton military trucks. Initial thoughts are to turn these into one type 4 wildland/structural engine with a 750 gallon tank and one water tender with about a 1500 gallon tank. That will probably go on our to-do list if the trucks pass our inspection.
- This year our volunteer firefighters grew from around 10 to 21 in numbers, with more applications pending. Training is a continual process on both the wildland and structural sides. First aid and CPR training courses were also completed. Four of our volunteers also took part in training that allows them to pursue the FF1 (fire fighter 1) classification. An effort is being made to get training for volunteers willing to be first responders in medical emergencies. Fitting and training for SCBA (Self Contained Breathing Apparatus) is just beginning.
- We decided to adopt DNR's strategy of being very aggressive with fires. This means sending as many vehicles and firefighters into reported in-valley fires as can be mustered. The idea is to catch it small and prevent a big government run project fire. When lightning's forecasted to move through the area we kick into surveillance mode, dispatching vehicles if necessary to

adequately monitor what's happening. That's how we caught the August 8 fire started by lightning behind Mt. Anne and stopped it before it got rolling.

Editorial Section

Since we don't have any reader input as this time we'll submit a question that has been heard from multiple sources. It is "*why do we respond to fires outside the district*"? This is a complicated question since there are a number of reasons, depending on the circumstances. To answer that let's break it down into different scenarios.

1. Fire is in the valley but outside our district – for now we have chosen to respond to all local fires for the best reason of all, that being training. Not responding would have given us experience on only two fires in two years, one being a vehicle and the other a small smoldering grass fire (only 3 firefighters handled both fires). We are still a new district and need as much diverse and realistic training as we can cram in. Isn't it much better to train aggressively on non-district fires than have a group of total greenhorns tackle our first big district fire? The second reason is that, even without the training aspect, we would want to go after a fire that could turn and enter our district much, much bigger than had we tackled it at the onset. A big side benefit is the good will generated by our efforts that will hopefully result in the district being able to grow and increase our tax revenue.
2. Requests for assistance from other districts or DNR – When we became a fire district we automatically (no choice) had mutual aid agreements with all other Okanogan fire districts. That means we respond to their calls for aid, at our cost, if we have the ability to do so. The upside is that we can (and did on several occasions) call for help. With no mutual aid every district would have to equip for its worst case scenario. For us that could easily be 15 – 20 engines and 5 – 10 water tenders. We can't afford or staff that much equipment. With DNR it's a little different. We signed a mutual aid agreement with them, otherwise they were not obligated to assist us (the downside of becoming a fire district). The reason we want to be buddies with DNR is that, besides the engine support, they can bring in the big guns (aerial tankers and helicopters) on short notice. Even if we could do that we wouldn't. One late afternoon round of air support would blow our entire yearly budget. DNR is the equivalent of the 800 pound gorilla and we definitely want them on our side. Oh yes, let's mention training again. Don't want to miss those opportunities, especially since we're learning from a very experienced professional force.
3. Government requests to contract our services on a project fire – To get it out of the way let's just say training one more time, again with professionals on big fires. But the biggest reason is simply the money. Taking away our ability to earn extra money and just relying on taxes would doom this district to years of stagnation. It is not a stretch to say we could easily be limited to our initial donated 2 brush engines for a decade or more as all our tax money is spent on replacing or repairing equipment, keeping pace with regulatory requirements and changes and escalating operating costs. Forget about eventually getting some kind of permanent fire station. Never happen on a \$20,000 yearly budget. A very important point is that we've received a lot of help because we're willing to help ourselves. Donations and grants would dry up if we just sat back and waited for others to give.

That completes our first newsletter. We're really looking forward to your comments and questions. To subscribe, ask questions, give comments or let us know the latest rumors please send an email to "avfdnews@amerion.com". Questions can also be sent via mail to "Okanogan FPD 16, PO Box 645, Tonasket WA 98855-0645". Sorry but this newsletter will only be distributed via email or bulletin board as it's not a fire district funded activity. A limited number of paper copies will be available at the fire commissioners meetings.



Engine 1611 currently in service



New aid unit (not in service yet)