



Ronald Bond/The Observer

La Grande Fire Chief Les Thomas gives a look inside the back of the department’s new Medic 2 ambulance.

AMBULANCE

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purchase under budget, with Thomas saying the cost was about \$168,000. They saved tens of thousands of dollars by transferring and recertifying equipment from the old Medic 2, including the electric lift stretcher system, monitors and intravenous pumps. He added that the maintenance plan already in place for the medical equipment was able to “briefly” extend their window of use. “(The lift system) alone is \$58,000,” Thomas said. “We were able to use the one from our previous ambulance and were able to have it serviced and recertified. We saved money there.” The new ambulance, built by Braun Northwest — a Chehalis, Washington, company that manufactures emergency vehicles — replaced the 1996 model that was still in the fleet from when the department took over the transport service from the hospital. “It was in reserve status. You had to put money into it every year,” Thomas said of the old Medic 2. The oldest of the remaining ambulances, Medic 4, a 2006 model, has been moved to reserve status. “If we run out of ambulances or have one break, we move (Medic 4) from reserve status up,” Thomas explained. “We’ve been generally running several days with two or three

ambulance calls at the same time. You have to have the reserve fleet in case you have an issue.” Mechanical issues are an item Thomas said the department hasn’t faced often in his time as chief, recalling just one instance last fall, and he credited the work of firefighter Craig Gomes for his efforts in maintaining the fleet. “He is very adept at making sure the vehicles are maintained regularly. He helps us out tremendously with any of the minor maintenance issues up to some of the major issues (before) we have to send it off to a specialist,” Thomas said. The chief said, however, that breakdowns have happened in the past and are inevitable due to the wear and tear the emergency vehicles accumulate. The LGFD shares a 2,000-square-mile county with Elgin and Union as the other EMS partners. “Eventually something is going to break,” he said, pointing out the vehicles are often driven in a way and with a frequency that causes more wear and tear. “Your car doesn’t break down as often because you don’t drive it like that 365 days a year.” In the event of a breakdown while on call, Thomas said, the training of the medical responders is focused on patient care until another ambulance arrives, though he added a driver will look to see if the repair can be done

quickly. “We are equipped and educated to where we can hold our own in the ambulance as long as we need to within reason. It’s not a hospital and not an emergency room, but we stabilize (the patient) as much as we can,” he said. Thomas’ hope is to bring in a new ambulance every three to five years to keep upgrading what he called an “aging” fleet. While mileage is not the primary factor in determining when to replace a vehicle, he noted that one of the ambulances, the 2006 GMC reserve vehicle, has nearly 200,000 miles on it and a second has more than 100,000. The new ambulance, by comparison, had less than 700 miles on it as of late Wednesday afternoon. The other two ambulances in rotation are 2012 and 2015 Fords. “It’s not based on the mileage as much as on the actual repair cost (and) wear and tear on the vehicle itself. If you keep putting money into an ambulance over and over again, that’s the money you could have put into replacing it,” he said. The fire chief said the city has been supportive in getting the department what it needs while remaining within budget. “Mr. Strope is really good with his guidance on (saying), ‘This is what I foresee. What can you do within these parameters?’” Thomas said.

JACKMAN

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person. He really cares and will be missed,” Carson said. Jackman is also respected for his calm, friendly demeanor, which has helped him resolve more than one conflict at LMS. Mike Hayden of Cove, who retired last year after serving as LMS’s head custodian for nine years, said his personality has served Jackman well at LMS. Hayden noted that if two students were involved in a dispute, Jackman was able to resolve the situation quickly and in a friendly manner. “He can get to the bottom of why they are upset,” Hayden said. Regardless of how a student has behaved, Jackman strives to have a short memory. “Everyday is a fresh start,” Jackman said. He is patient with students in part because he understands that the middle school years are difficult, a time when students are transitioning from children to young adults. His patience is coupled with the goal of helping students see the importance of good decision making and the fallout that can result from poor choices. “You can control the choices you make, not the consequences of your actions,” Jackman said. The educator took the position in Nyssa because it will fulfill his lifelong goal of becoming a school principal and he will be closer to his wife, who lives in the Boise

area. They were married in September. “This will give us a chance to see each other more,” said Jackman. At Nyssa High School, Jackman will be aided by his ability to speak Spanish. Jackman, who earlier taught Spanish at La Grande High School for five years, noted that about 80 percent of the families at Nyssa are of Hispanic descent. “(My ability to speak Spanish) will help me the most with communicating with parents,” Jackman said. The educator said many positive strides have been made at LMS and in the school district over the past 13 years. These include the creation of the school district’s Professional Learning Communities program. Through the program teachers work together intensely to develop individualized education programs for students. “The PLC program has made a tremendous difference,” Jackman said. “It changed the way we do business at the middle school.” Jackman is excited about the chance to apply the many things he has learned as an educator at Nyssa High School. “It will be a new adventure. I am super excited and I want to make a difference,” he said. He will be succeeded at LMS by Chris Wagner, who is now a half-time assistant principal at both LMS and Central Elementary School. “Chris will do a wonderful job. He has so much energy,” Jackman said.

AWARD

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of time, he said. “The streamlined process moved the approval process from the Secretary of Agriculture to the Under Secretary,” McFetridge said. “It also streamlined the economic assessment to highlight the price trends, supply and demand.” The streamlined process has allowed for USDA to be more reactive to requests from industries. A request now can be approved in a few weeks to a month versus the old process in which it could take multiple months to get approval. Funding for the Section 32 purchasing program is collected from the tariffs that importers pay to bring their products into the country. No taxpayer money is used on these purchases. “In the second half of last year alone, AMS was able to cost-effectively purchase on a timely basis 15 types of fruits, vegetables, dairy and meat products worth more than \$300 million to feed hungry Americans,” he said. McFetridge and his team members demonstrated exemplary service to American farmers, ranchers, foresters and producers of American agriculture with the goal of doing right and feeding families across the country. “Typically, an industry experiencing a bumper crop will contact USDA to request a Section 32 purchase,” he said. “Once the request is received, USDA

will complete an economic assessment of the industry and the request.” McFetridge performs the assessment, which provides the justification for either approving or rejecting the request. If a request is justified, the economist will work with USDA’s purchasing department and the Food and Nutrition Service to determine the food banks’ demand of the product. “Based on the food banks’ demand, a quantity and dollar amount will be assigned to the request,” explained McFetridge. “A decision memo based on the economic assessment (is then submitted).” McFetridge works in the South Building of the United States Department of Agriculture located in Washington, D.C. “I work as an economist in the Promotion and Economics Division under the Specialty Crops Program that is part of the Agricultural Marketing Service,” he said. “Specialty Crops are primarily fruits and vegetables but we also work on (products such as) Christmas trees and softwood lumber.” His daily work entails tracking market trends, pricing and other areas that impact the production for different specialty crops. One of the biggest parts of his job is working with the procurement department determining if contracted prices of fruits and vegetables for the National School Lunch program are fair and reasonable. “There are additional

hurdles to ensure food safety, and a big part of my job is to ensure USDA isn’t overpaying for the fruits and vegetables that are purchased,” McFetridge said. The AMS team received an agency-level Gears of Government Award in April and were then nominated for the Gears of Government President’s Award. The team also received a Secretary’s Honor Award from Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue in March 2019. The Gears of Government Awards recognize individuals and teams across the federal workforce whose dedication supports

exceptional delivery of key outcomes for the American people, specifically: mission results, customer service and accountable stewardship. The President’s Award is the highest level of distinction within the Gears of Government Awards program and recognizes the best of the best with only eight awardees selected from more than 200 agency-level award recipients. McFetridge and the other AMS team members were formally recognized at the Gears of Government President’s Awards Ceremony on May 22 in Washington, D.C.

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