

VRFPD Board of Directors Candidate Interviews *continued from front page*

Christie is also a Paramedic who works for Metro West and teaches at PCC. We have a son, little Ben who is 21 months old.

Luke Ellis: I grew up in Vernonia and lived here for twenty-nine years. I graduated from high school here and then got my culinary degree from Western Culinary Institute. When I was a junior in high school I was part of the Fire Science program we had here and then joined the department during my senior year in 2002, so I have been a firefighter here for over eleven years. I recently helped start the Pancake Breakfast, I've been an Officer-in-Training, and I've grown with the department and helped it move forward.

I would bring the perspective of the volunteers to the Board. I have a different point of view than a lot of the Board members currently have. I am more for the volunteers and for better Public Relations and communicating with the public. I want to make sure the volunteers are taken care of. I also know we can't lose sight of the business side and make sure that things get done and paid.

I am married to Torie, who has also been a volunteer Firefighter for eight years. We have three children: Joseph, 6, Jordynn, 3 and Joshwa, 2. Our children are sixth generation Vernonians.

Mike Demeter: My wife Marci and I moved here in 1989 so this will be our twenty-fourth year in Vernonia. People in the community may know who Marci and I are, we're the people with the large Irish Wolfhounds; we try to march in the St. Patrick's Day Parade every year.

When we first moved out here we were destitute, to put it mildly, and so we used a lot of the services that were available. Over the years as things have improved for us we have managed to start giving things back to the community. I joined the Fire Department a little over five years ago, right after the flood when we had lost so many of our firefighters who had to move away or quit. I worked with the department for a little over four years; I resigned in January because my work situation changed and I was no longer able to meet the time and training requirements.

I work for Intel, I'm a staff security engineer there and I travel the world working with very diverse groups of people. I work in multi-cultural, diverse groups, trying to find consensus, trying to work getting things done. We

always tell people, "Don't come to the table with a problem, come to the table with a solution." I think people need to do their homework and bring solutions so you can move forward.

Why are you running for the VRFPD Board of Directors?

Ben Davis: The Board of Directors is something I have been interested in for a while because it's a position where I feel I can still serve the community. Right now I feel this is the best way for me to serve the department and the community with not as much of a time commitment. I also have a lot of interest because it has to do with the administration side of the district; to this point I have mostly been involved in day-to-day operations and I am really taking more interest in the strategic planning, long term goals and administration of fire districts, not just the responding aspect. That is the direction I am wanting to go and still be able to serve the community.

Luke Ellis: I think the best step for me now to move further is to join the Board and implement changes.

I see things falling through the cracks on the Board. I want to see it run like a business. If you don't run it like a business it will go under.

I have been on the department and have seen what has gone on in the past and been here as we worked through the hard times and tried to rebuild it. I want the community to know that we are here for them, not just because we have to be there. I want the community to know what we do and somehow give more ownership to the community. We're a small community and a small department. If you pull the community in more I think we will go further and people will respect more what we do and understand what we do and support what we are trying to do.

Mike Demeter: We have lived here for both of the floods. I know how depressed the economy is here. I know for a fact that the Fire Department has lots of needs, lots of things that are breaking on a regular basis and it costs them tons of money to fix. The problem is that we can't go to the community and ask them for more money, because they are already cash strapped with the water rates, the electric rates, our tax rates and the work base—there is no work here. So it's going to take people who can go out and look for other means to resolve it.

My job with Intel and the amount of travel that I do was prohibit-

ing me from volunteering. I didn't want to resign but it was getting harder and harder for me to maintain the 135 hours of minimum training each year. It was very frustrating for me to not be able to go out on calls, so this is a way for me to still be involved with the Fire Department because I really miss it.

I want to do this for myself and for the community. I joined the Fire Department to give back to the community. I had to leave because my job required it, so I wanted something that I could do even if I'm away—I can do the reading and the work when I'm away and with Board meetings just once a month I can contribute. I have access to lots of research tools and capabilities. I have written grants for VRFPD in the past, this would give me more time and a chance to help in that way.

As a Board member, what would you hope to accomplish? What are your goals?

Ben Davis: A Board members role is to set policy, make sure the budget is balanced properly and that the public's funds are spent correctly. I think, at times we have had Board members who have maybe tried to get a little too involved in operations, which is not their position. My goal as a Board member is to help with the long term direction that Chief Smith and the volunteers want to go. The Board needs to work as a team to find ways to promote and reach those long term goals. We have a good group of volunteers and we have a good Chief and as a Board member I hope we can help them accomplish their goals within the confines of the budget and the law. My goals include helping with the strategic planning and direction.

Personally, over the years I have seen a need in the training aspect—it's why I filled that role for several years. I personally think the department, in the future, may need at least a part-time, paid position created—someone who can dedicate time to do that training for us. It is a job that requires a big commitment and isn't something Chief Smith necessarily has time to do. There are a lot of small departments around the state that have a paid Chief and a part-time training officer to make the organization run well, I think that is a good goal for the district.

There are also long term issues with apparatus that needs to be replaced and some issues with the station facility that may need to be changed in the fu-

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ture. Those are long term things that I think, between the Board of Directors, the Chief and the volunteers, we can all get on the same page and really move forward with a good strategic plan.

Luke Ellis: I think we need to figure out how we can get a second paid person at the station full time, so we have someone there five days a week, from 9 to 5.

We also need to do something to update the rigs. Maybe going out and getting some grants or eventually to push for a bond, but figuring out how to get some new rigs. There are four rigs that honestly need to be replaced.

I think we need goals for the department, in the sense that the Board

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