

VERNONIA RURAL FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

Dead Dinosaurs

By Chief Dean Smith

The fire service has, to my knowledge, always had a hard time with change. I started volunteering in late 2001 and within the first few years had the ability to get training outside of our own agency and visit other departments. Training was taken wherever it was available if I could manage to get the time off from my regular job to go take it. I visited several other stations in Columbia County and surrounding counties. Time was spent as far away as Pendleton and Ashland, and after several of these classes and seminars there seemed to be a few common themes: change, volunteerism, and the ever-increasing job demands. I was told once at a seminar about volunteerism that most of the people in the room were dead dinosaurs. The group laughed but I believe we all took that to heart that day – the fire service has always resisted change. I haven't been to a seminar or conference yet where someone didn't use the phrase, "Cause it's the way we've always done it," and/or "It still works for us." I tried to be part of the group who accepted the new ways of doing things, but in turn I found a comfortable spot in the yesterday. It was easier to continue the struggle with something comfortable rather than try something new and risk the imposed catastrophic failure.

As I was moved into the management/administrative role here at the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District, the learning curve for district operations, training, volunteer coordination, administrative duties, and the like, seemed never ending. It was as though every task or project that would get completed, three more would come into view with an increasingly heavy need. So, for years we continued to slowly pick the hottest iron in the fire and try to manage it while not knocking the other out of place.

When the community heard our calls for help in the way of an Operational Levy, we hired a Training Captain. This position helped spread the load of some administrative duties as well as being burdened with solidifying a training program that had been handed from a volunteer training officer. This

was a very daunting task as every volunteer that put the exhaustive labor into the program had done so to the extent of burnout and loss of love for the position.

The District continued to "do what we do" and pushed on, making the ends meet but never really breaking through to a consistent level of stability and growth. Our administrative needs continued to outgrow the hours of available productivity and the call volume increased steadily. We were graced by the community with our current operating levy that allowed us a third full-time administrator to, yet again, help spread the load of higher-level duties. As the staff started to whittle away at the growing irons in the fire, the call volume continued its increase and the numbers of volunteers, as well as the hours they were available, continued to decrease.

Part of the current Operations Levy was to fund a Resident Volunteer program where we teamed up with our neighboring district Mist-Birkenfeld. Together we assembled this program and had up to six students, enrolled in college classes, split between the two districts. This program showed promise and after the initial training phase provided, at the minimum, one additional responder every day. Slowly there were changes with the participants of the program and with some rule changes in the governing bodies the program had to be cancelled. Some of the personnel are still volunteers but their availability is limited.

I say all of this above to get to this point of change. In the past the district has tried to expand its administrative grasp on the district's overall growth but that has seemed to just "kick the can down the road." With the vacancy in the Training Chief's position, the admin has somewhat divvied up the duties between each other and utilized the remaining funds in this year's budget to hire a temporary full-time line firefighter/EMT. We have also managed to hire three part-time firefighter/EMTs.

The problem we continue to run into with our reduced volunteer response is the paid staff overtime to ensure that someone responds to the call for service. That someone was usually a "Duty Officer," either paid or volunteer.

The last couple of years have been increasingly hard for all our population base and the crews here were not left out of that. The ability to have someone respond to each call still weighs on the Duty Officer and we are looking to move past this roadblock.

The plan is to do our best to consolidate the big stuff between the admin and spread out the more common and repeatable projects and chores to paid and full-time staff. If the upcoming budget allows, we will have one Fire Chief, one Operations/Training Chief as well as two full-time and five part-time firefighters to create a more consistent first out response crew.



My overall goal is to make sure that we continue to increase the personnel on scene in a way that is consistent while being as fiscally responsible as we can. If we don't continue to adapt and change, we just may become extinct.

VRFPD BOARD MEETINGS ARE HELD ON THE SECOND TUESDAY OF THE MONTH AT 7:00 PM. The next meeting is scheduled for May 9, 2022 at the fire station, 555 E. Bridge Street.

Calls responded to March 1-31

Fire	1
Emergency Medical Service	21
Hazardous Condition	1
Service Call	1
Good Intent	3
False Alarm	1
Total	28

Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District PART TIME FIREFIGHTER-EMT



The Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District seeks to fill up to three part-time firefighter/emt position with a motivated and self-directed, experienced firefighter.

Firefighter-EMT's are responsible for responding to emergency situations as part of a team, assessing and treating patients, and responding to fire, rescue, and service calls. Other tasks include administrative duties in completing reports, assisting with training, and maintaining equipment and facilities.

This is a PART TIME position.

Minimum Qualifications:

- High School Diploma or GED
- Must be 18 years of age
- NFPA Firefighter 1 certification
- NFPA Apparatus Driver/Operator
- HealthCare CPR certification
- Oregon Emergency Medical Technician
- Valid and insurable driver's license

Desired Qualifications:

- Oregon EMT Advanced or Intermediate
- NFPA Firefighter II
- NWCG FF type 1 or NWCG Engine Boss
- Working Knowledge of the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District

Position is Open until Filled: First Review of Applications 1-20-2022

Applications are available at the Vernonia Rural Fire Protection District office Monday through Thursday between 8:00am and 4:00pm or by email at info@vernoniarfpd.us

To Apply: Submit a completed application, Resume, and Cover Letter via email at info@vernoniarfpd.us or in person at 555 E Bridge St Vernonia OR 97064.

Questions about this position may be directed to:

Rob Davis Operations Division Chief, 503-429-8252

Compensation:

This is a Non-Exempt 24 hour per week position.

Salary range: \$18.00-\$23.00 per hour depending on experience and qualifications

This position is not eligible for Benefits.

VERNONIA
RURAL
FIRE DIST.



CAN YOU FILL THESE BOOTS?

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

Call Dean Smith for more information on free training (503)429-8252