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Applegater

Photo by Kathy Kliewer

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Celebrating
~21~
Years

Applegate Fire Chief Fillis to retire

BY SANDY SHAFFER

Alas, after 20 years as our fire chief, Brett Fillis is retiring! Yup, at the end of March he and his wife Connie will head to Baja, so I sat down with him recently to pick his brain one last time.

I got to know Brett in 2001 when the Applegate Partnership & Watershed Council received a grant to write the first community fire plan in the nation. A long-time resident of the Applegate, Chief Fillis saw the value of a community-based plan and was one of our strongest supporters, actively participating through every level of the plan's development and implementation. To this day, very few local fire chiefs have played as active a role in their community's fire preparedness as our chief.

History lesson: Brett got his first fire truck at age two. When he was five or six, he tried to fix the babysitter's lighter, accidentally setting the family's garage on fire. When he was 16, he was invited to attend "drill night" at Rogue River Fire District, got hooked, and started taking college classes at night to get his fire science degree. He was hired by Valley Fire Service (now Rural-Metro) immediately after graduating high school.

When Brett was hired in 1995 as our fire chief, there were five fire stations, the apparatus/engines were very "used," volunteer firefighters were handed used gear, and training was hit-and-miss.

District constituents' ISO property insurance rating levels were at seven (10 being the worst).

Twenty years later the district has seven stations, which lowered ISO rating levels to six (meaning lower homeowner insurance rates for constituents). We also have a fleet of 27 updated and specialized engines and vehicles, top-quality air packs, medical and rescue equipment, and over 40 academy-trained volunteers, all with their own sets of gear!

Quite a change, so I asked Brett what his "strong suit" was—what enabled him to be successful in making so many improvements to the district? He said it was because he could not accept that "this is the way it is." (His favorite word as a kid was "why?") He felt his ability to "color outside the box" helped him find creative and economical solutions to the unique challenges our fire district faced.

And unique we are, with homes, mobile home parks, businesses, farms, wildland-urban interface residences, campgrounds, and recreational sites all



Chief Fillis, with wife Connie, received a Certificate of Commendation from the Oregon Fire Chiefs' Association in 2004. Photo: Lang Johnson Photography.



An advocate of real training scenarios, Fire Chief Fillis watches over a prescribed fire-burn training exercise.

under one fire district's jurisdiction. Our firefighters need to be multi-skilled here in the Applegate, and we've benefitted greatly from the fact that Brett and Chief Dan Petersen (Fire District #3) developed the first minimum 40-hour training curriculum for southern Oregon in 1982!

Chief Fillis also has very good financial sense. Our fire



Chief Fillis believes in recruiting firefighters at an early age.

district now utilizes a five-year financial planning system, which is supported by constituents and funded through levies. Our multi-talented fire staff pitches in to refurbish engines to fit our district's long, narrow driveways, whether it be for a wildfire or a medical call. They also write grants for new equipment, help build and repair stations, and service vehicles in-house! Chief Fillis feels that being fiscally 'frugal' as a district, as patrons, as employees, and as volunteers is our strongest asset.

I asked Brett which single part of this job he most enjoyed, and, if you know him, you're not surprised by his response. He's a people person; he loved meeting the district's patrons, assisting us to work through the county permitting process for new home development, and also helping us to achieve our fuel-reduction goals.

See CHIEF FILLIS, page 11

SAVE THE DATE!

The Applegater's
Annual
Summer Soirée

Saturday, June 25, 6 to 9 pm
Schmidt Family Vineyards

Join us for dinner, wine,
live music by
The Evening Shades,
and silent auction.

Watch for more details
on our Facebook page.

Grow with respect

BY JAKOB SHOCKEY

So you've moved to the Applegate with plans to "grow" this year. You're from Florida, New York, or Texas, and you've rented a house with some old pastureland or with a place for a greenhouse. Maybe you're on a hillside and plan to clear out that manzanita and bulldoze some terraces. The green-rush is on, and even though the local market is flooded, your get-rich endeavor doesn't

really depend on the Oregon market anyway, does it? So while we are being real with each other, let me give you some neighborly and honest advice on how to be respectful of this watershed and its community.

Generally, Applegaters tend to beat around the bush in a conversation if it's an uncomfortable topic. I'm not going to do that here.

Following are some of the things that people are thinking, but few will say to your face.

If you are putting in a grow and plan to water it, get a water right. That's what everybody else has to do, and many of our creeks can barely balance the legal irrigation draws with fish and wildlife needs during the summer without the additional burden of your Honda pump. And please, don't illegally use your household well for your irrigation needs. It's not an endless supply down there in

See RESPECT, page 24

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