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IVFD honors Howell; safe work noted

By SHARON SILVA

Veteran Volunteer Fire-fighter Ralph Howell was presented a certificate, commending him for 20 years of service, during the Thursday night, Dec. 12 meeting of the Illinois Valley Fire District Board in Cave Junction City Hall.

Speaking of Howell's service, Chief Kyle Kirchner said, "To me it is just incredible: It is hard to find people with that level of commitment."

Following the award presentation, Jeff Griffin, president of Griffin-Tabor, the parent company of Wilson Airgood, provider of insurance for the district, addressed the board concerning the cost of insurance.

Speaking of increasing insurance costs, Griffin said that some people blame Sept. 11, 2001 for the increase.

"However, 9-11 was just a catalyst," he said. "You're way under budget this year, to your credit. Your rates are a reflection of your loss history. You run a great district."

"Everything looks good for next year except for health insurance. We have to be frugal buyers. Health insurance companies are making profits, I don't know why the rates are so high."

Griffin said that just as insurance rates have increased as a knee-jerk reaction to terrorism, they will come back down.

"OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Act) is tough on noise conservation," he said. "For four or five years things have been good between OSHA and the fire service, but it's getting tougher."

"HIPPA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) is still a big deal. How we store and keep medical records and EMS records is important."

Griffin explained that it is illegal to fax medical records, because it is considered an invasion of privacy. "This is a criminal offense, not just civil," he said.

Finishing his presentation to the board, Griffin said, "Fire coverage continues to be very reasonable, and that's due to your good management."

(Continued on page 9)



FAMILY TREE MUSICAL BENEFIT - Linda Oncay presented music director T. Lund checks for more than \$500 to benefit the music programs at Illinois Valley High School and Lorna Byrne Middle School. The presentation was made on Saturday, Dec. 14 at Family Tree Garden Center in Cave Junction. It was the fifth annual I.V. Music Dept. benefit and open house sponsored by Oncay's business. Members of the IVHS and LBMS choirs performed for an appreciative crowd and presented another concert on Dec. 7 at Family Tree as part of the annual fund-raiser. Donations are still being accepted for the music students.

Rough & Ready aims at sale of entire plant

Owners hopeful; but if mill sells they want to assist 150 employees with new careers

Whether or not the cry, "Timber!" will signal the actual downfall of major community employer Rough & Ready Lumber Co. sometime next year remains to be seen, following the Dec. 4 announcement of impending closure.

John Krauss, one of the managing owners of the family owned firm with Fred Krauss, said this week that selling the mill physical plant and log/lumber inventories "is our first priority at this point."

He said that the firm is trying to contact potential buyers that "our operation is for sale. At the same time we are developing a plan to implement closure of the plant if a sale doesn't occur."

Rough & Ready, approximately 4 miles south of Downtown Cave Junction, employs approximately 150 people, most of whom live in Illinois Valley. The firm has an annual payroll of some \$5 million and is the largest private employer in the valley.

Despite strong concerns from most quarters regarding closure, and how it could affect the valley economy, John Krauss said on Monday, Dec. 16 that both sawmills at the site will continue operating through the end of March or the first half of April 2003.

The planing and finishing

operations will continue, he said, until the first half of May. And he estimates that the shipping department will remain open through at least mid-June.

"We're trying to get out there to try and encourage potential buyers so that they'll know we're for sale," he said. "At the same time we're developing a plan to implement the closure in case there's no sale."

At the same time, he said, R&R has been contacting its many longtime friends, supporters and customers about the current situation.

"People have been very supportive of us," Krauss said, "and we are extremely grateful. There is no doubt that this decision has disrupted many lives in our community, and that's difficult for all of us to deal with."

"Our employees -- the best crew anywhere -- also have been supportive and understanding. Some of them are second- and third-generation employees. I appreciate all our co-workers in what they have done for us through the years."

"We are hopeful that we can help our employees evolve and move on to new careers if a buyer doesn't come forth."

Since the Dec. 4 announcement, made to assem-

bled employees at the mill, Commissioner Harold Haugen, of Josephine County, contacted Krauss to express his concern.

As well, the I.V. Community Response Team has been in contact regarding what might be done to help.

In addition, Krauss said that he has learned from a source that there is word in Washington, D.C. that logs will be found.

Many in the valley and elsewhere see the possible closure as one of the most significant potential economic blows in valley history.

Rough & Ready, through its 80 years, has maintained a sense of dedication to the community, Krauss indicated. Whether the company will be able to maintain its support of various endeavors at previous levels remains to be seen.

In the firm's front office, a large bookcase is filled with plaques, awards and certificates for R&R's support of organizations including the I.V. Chamber of Commerce, Boys & Girls Club, I.V. Lions Club, Little League, I.V. Fire District, I.V. Golf Course; and Substation North, the organization of retired personnel from Long Beach (Calif.) Police Dept. that visits the valley each year.

Krauss said that the situa-

tion now facing the business, the last remaining sawmill in the county, has been developing during the past 15 years. Factors include lawsuits by various groups against timber sale programs, and a total shutdown of timber sales some 12 years ago by a federal judge.

"That was only the beginning of the current challenges facing the industry today," he explained.

At around the same time, he said, the family decided to discontinue a second shift at the mill "because it was apparent that raw material was going to be harder to come by in the future." This dropped the number of workers from approximately 225 to the current 150.

Although the Krauss Family has timber holdings in Josephine, Jackson and Douglas counties, should a sale or closure occur, the family has decided to retain those holdings.

Though their timber tracts have supplied 20 to 30 percent

(Continued on page 9)

CHRISTMAS BASKETS of food and toys were distributed to hundreds of Illinois Valley residents on Saturday, Dec. 14 at the I.V. Family Resource Center. (Additional photos, page 7)

HOLIDAY BASKETBALL during the annual Winter Tournament at Illinois Valley High School was played on Saturday and Sunday, Dec. 14 and 15 at the school. The Cougar boys won first place, and the Cougar girls took second place. (Photo by Mary Wertz) Additional photos, page 9.

Relocation of Krauss Craft set

Krauss Craft, a Cave Junction commercial playground equipment manufacturer, received a \$500,000 loan (approved earlier this month by the Josephine County Commission), from the Oregon Business Development Fund to relocate to Merlin.

Krauss Craft, currently located across Redwood Hwy. from Rough & Ready Lumber Co., has purchased the former Coachmen Industries building in the North Valley Industrial Park. It soon will relocate its facilities and 40 employees to the new location.

The Merlin building, with 63,000 square-feet of space, is located a short distance north of Grants Pass on Interstate 5.

The company said that it needed to expand and was considering locations out of the area, as well as the Merlin building location.

The OBDF is a revolving loan fund that provides permanent working capital and/or long-term, fixed-rate financing up to \$500,000 for land, buildings, equipment and machinery. Projects that promote manufacturing, processing and regionally significant tourism activities are eligible.

The Oregon Economic and Community Development Dept. (OEDD) is a state agency that invests lottery, federal and other funds to help communities and businesses create better jobs and improve their economic opportunities and quality of life.

"The majority of employees will be making the drive or moving with us, which is important to us for the economic health of the Illinois Valley," said Kurt Krauss, president and general manager of Krauss Craft.

Krauss added, "Kathy Peckham of US Bank, Bruce Laird and Gary Ross of OEDD, and Jim Frick, of Century 21 Harris & Taylor were instrumental in helping us make the purchase and the move."

