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WHILE SUPPLIES LAST • LIMITED TO STOCK ON HAND • NO RAINCHECKS

I.V. Fire looks to hire 4 firefighters

Anita R. Savio
IVN Contributing Writer

A proposed five-year levy by the Illinois Valley Fire District of 50 cents per thousand will allow the district to hire and outfit four firefighter/emergency medical technicians (EMTs).

Fire Chief Dennis Hoke said that the district's sole reliance on volunteer firefighters is not sufficient to meet current demands on the district.

"Right now the district has a number of volunteers that provide ancillary services, but only 15 volunteers who have been willing to go through the firefighting and EMT training. And of those, the majority work, they may have two jobs. They have families."

"We get a structure fire," added Hoke, "and three, maybe four, people show up."

The National Fire Protection Association recommends 12 firefighters for fire attack on a house fire.

Hoke explained that the lack of sufficient volunteer firefighters is a nationwide problem, not limited to the Illinois Valley, due to the substantial time and out-of-pocket expenses required of volunteers.

Reliance on volunteers also creates a problem for the district's call-out response time, which currently averages nine minutes. But, according to Hoke, in the case of cardiac arrest, brain death occurs in four to six minutes. Fires in houses of modern construction reach flashover in seven to nine minutes.

"The volunteer has to leave his home, drive to the fire station, get his suit on and get his fire apparatus and go to the call. But with paid firefighters we can cut the response time because they will be based, in 24 hour shifts, at the fire station."

The district is also seeing a yearly increase of five to 10 percent in the volume of calls it receives. Last year, IVFD responded to 1374 calls for service, of which 65 percent were medical.

The four new hires will double the number of firefighter/EMTs available to respond to any one emergency.

Hoke said that the levy will raise an average of \$333,000 in each of the five years

covered by the levy. That will cover salaries of approximately \$40,000, plus associated costs such as health insurance, payroll taxes, workman's compensation insurance, mandatory PERS, overtime, equipment and specialized training. Hoke noted that the new hire salary level is about \$10,000 less than what most other departments pay, which will create somewhat of a revolving door.

"We expect we will be constantly training hires and then seeing them leave to join higher paying departments."

Hoke addressed the question of what financial impact the levy will have on Illinois Valley property owners. For the past five years, property owners have been paying 25 cents per thousand to purchase radios, breathing apparatus and protective equipment for the district. But that levy has now run its course and gone away. With the new levy of 50 cents, taxpayers will effectively be seeing an increase of only 25 cents over what they have already been paying for the past five years.

"For a home assessed at \$100,000, that's less than the cost of a gallon of milk per month."

Hoke noted that the money can only be accessed to hire the four new firefighters/EMTs.

"Not a cent will leave this Valley."

Hoke also addressed the public safety issue.

"The cutback in funding for the sheriff has put our first responders at unacceptable risk. I can't tell you the number of times we continue to get ourselves in a situation where law enforcement is not available when we need them."

"If the sheriff office shuts down patrol after July 1st (the start of the 2017/18 fiscal year), that's going to have a huge impact on us. And that also makes it hard to get volunteers. They want to fight fires. They want to go to medical college. They don't want to be assaulted or shot at."

Hoke added that people will call the fire department for what are really law enforcement calls, because they know the fire department will respond even if the sheriff's department doesn't.

"And then we find ourselves in the middle of a burglary or murder."

Three Rivers removes acting from superintendent title

The Three Rivers School District Board of Directors is pleased to announce that David Valenzuela has been approved as permanent superintendent of Three Rivers School District. At the Feb. 21 board meeting, the Board voted unanimously on the decision. Valenzuela was originally appointed as the district's interim superintendent on May 17, 2016. Board Chair Danny York stated, "We're very excited to make this announcement and we're hopeful that this is the long-term solution that the district is looking for."

Valenzuela has a long history with Three Rivers School District. Having attended Three Rivers schools throughout his

childhood, Valenzuela has been associated with the district for over 38 years in various capacities. He served as the director of curriculum and instruction, technology, and federal programs from 2012 to 2016. Before that, Valenzuela served the district in the capacities of principal, vice principal, middle and high school teacher, and maintenance worker. He holds a Master of Arts in secondary education from Southern Oregon University, and a Bachelor of Arts in secondary education from Western Oregon University.

"I would like to sincerely thank the Three Rivers District Board of Education for the appointment of superintendent," said

Valenzuela. "Three Rivers School District provided me with the educational foundation that has essentially paved my career pathway in the field of education. I am deeply honored to have the opportunity to serve as the superintendent for this great district."

Board Vice-Chair Kate Dwyer shares the board's confidence that "Dave Valenzuela is the perfect fit to shepherd this district into increasing success." Board member Paul Kelly agreed, "Mr. Valenzuela has shown the board he has all the skills and experience to manage this district effectively for years to come."

Sessions: More violence around pot than 'one would think'

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department will try to adopt "responsible policies" for enforcement of federal anti-marijuana laws, Attorney General Jeff Sessions said Monday, adding that he believes violence surrounds sales and use of the drug in the U.S.

In a meeting with reporters, Sessions said the department was reviewing an Obama administration Justice Department memo that gave states flexibility in passing marijuana laws.

"Experts are telling me there's more violence around marijuana than one would think," Sessions said.

The comments were in keeping with remarks last week from White House spokesman Sean Spicer, who said the Justice Department would step up enforcement of federal law against recreational marijuana. Sessions stopped short of saying what he would do, but said he doesn't think America will be a better place with "more people smoking pot."

"I am definitely not a fan of expanded use of marijuana," he said. "But states, they can pass the laws they choose. I would just say, it does remain a violation of federal law to distribute marijuana throughout any place in the United States, whether a state legalizes it or not."

Eight states and the District of Columbia have legalized marijuana for recreational use. The Justice Department has several options available should it decide to enforce the law, including filing lawsuits on the grounds that state laws regulating pot are unconstitutional because they are pre-empted by federal law.

Studies have found no correlation between legalization of marijuana and violent crime rates. But law enforcement officials in states such as Colorado say drug traffickers have taken advantage of lax marijuana laws to hide in plain sight, illegally growing and shipping the drug across state lines, where it can sell for much higher.

Pot advocates say the officials have exaggerated the problem.

"You can't sue somebody for a drug debt. The only way to get your money is through strong-arm tactics, and violence tends to follow that," Sessions said.

Sessions said he met with Nebraska's attorney general, who sued Colorado for allegedly not keeping marijuana within its borders. That lawsuit was dismissed by the U.S. Supreme Court, but neighboring states continue to gripe that Colorado and other pot-legal states have not done enough to keep the drug from crossing their borders.