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Keizer's Christmas tree aglow

The Keizer Chamber of Commerce hosted the annual lighting of the Keizer Christmas Tree Tuesday, Dec. 1.

While the event typically draws a large crowd, spectators were encouraged to view the lighting on-line this year.

For the first time, the trunk of the tree is now protected by a wrought iron fence provided by Mike Gatchet of G & S Machine.

ABOVE: Santa lights the tree with the assistance of Ricky Fallardeau and Raegan Bethell.



'There's a big domino effect'

Marion County Fire District layoffs, station closures begin

By MATT RAWLINGS
Of the Keizertimes

After voters declined to renew the Marion County Fire District #1 (MCFD1) levy proposal at the Nov. 3 general election, Fire Chief Kyle McMann was forced to lay off 12 firefighters/paramedics from his staff.

It's the first time McMann has had to make staffing cuts since becoming the fire chief nearly two years ago.

"It was very difficult to do, mostly because I know all the staff members personally, but it also was hard because I knew what the impact on the public would be," McMann said.

The levy would have been at a rate of \$0.71 per \$1,000 of assessed property value for a five-year period, which is the same rate as it was from 2016 to 2020 — the levy accounted for 30% of the district's operating budget.

It was the second time this year that the district's levy renewal failed. At the May primary election, MCFD1 asked voters to increase the levy by \$0.28. The ballot measure, however, was not approved, which meant the entire levy failed for the July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021 fiscal year.

After the first levy failed in May, MCFD1 reduced

staffing, station hours and apparatus to try and balance the district budget. Employees and emergency personnel also accepted cuts to wages and health care benefits. But when the levy proposal failed for the second time in November, staffing cuts became unavoidable.

"We've hung on as long as we could," McMann said. "There are no more reserve funds to fall back on and service level reductions are inevitable."

The layoffs will bring minimum staffing levels from 14 down to eight emergency personnel per day at MCFD1's main facility. Since national standards require 14 firefighters to safely fight a structure fire, MCFD1 will require mutual aid for any fire that they respond to.

As a result of staff reduction, response times will increase to up to 15 minutes to some parts of the district.

"We will still respond to every call that we can, but the cuts decrease the amount of calls we can handle," McMann said. "There will be some

things that we just aren't able to do."

MCFD1's seven other facilities in the district will be greatly affected as well.

Fire stations in Macleay and Labish Center will be formally closed, and apparatus will be transferred to other facilities. The Four Corners, and Chemeketa/Middle Grove Stations will have staffing reduced from five personnel to two. The battalion chief responsible for command of fires and daily operations and supervision, will be cut from 24 to 12 hours a day.

"There are no more reserve funds to fall back on."

— Chief Kyle McMann
MCFD1

"There's a big domino effect," McMann said.

McMann said that the district will likely ask voters to consider a different levy in 2022.

"There were two levies that failed for the first time in the history of the district. We need to do a better job of understanding what the voters want and why they said no," McMann said. "But at the end of the day, we're going to do the best we can with the resources that we have."

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