

Drone: Fire Chief Benedict plans to take drone certification test



Fire Chief Matt Benedict demonstrates how the controls work on the department's new drone.

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December. Between the media attention and an anonymous \$700 donation from a Cannon Beach local to buy a drone after the rescue, instituting a program became a higher priority, Benedict said.

"The rescue of the dog on the cliff made the ball roll much faster than I ever could have imagined," Benedict said. "The drone gave us a chance to get eyeballs on the issue and let the search-and-rescue crew get right to it."

The idea of managing a drone program was met with mixed reaction at January's fire district board meeting.

"I was lukewarm on the idea of a drone until I saw how well it worked at the rescue at Tillamook Head," said Mark Mekenas, a fire district board member. "The PR and the results we got out of the dog rescue was worth the \$1,000 investment. Even if we just used it twice a year it would be worth it."

But board member Bob Cerelli didn't approve of how quickly the district was adopting the new program and the costs. He questioned whether a drone is a reliable enough tool.

"I think it's a waste of money and a waste of time. We have the best eyes in the

sky with the Coast Guard," Cerelli said. "I've flown them, and I just don't think it's a proper tool. I know what's involved."

Benedict said using a drone is no substitute for the Coast Guard.

"This program won't interfere with other programs," Benedict said. "If we can make the Coast Guard aware of the conditions of a rescue before they arrive, then they can be more prepared."

He also said new models, like the one the district owns, have many built-in safeguards to reduce the risk of accidents.

"I think right now it's really new. And we are starting very cautiously," Benedict said. "But I think after we have training and procedure, in a year we'll be very proficient and this will be standard."

Fire board members will hold a work session Feb. 20 to discuss in depth with Benedict about policy that would dictate who would be allowed to operate the drone, as well as define what types of situations it could be deployed.

Benedict plans to take a drone certification test within the next couple of months.

"This is the way of the future," he said. "We need to get trained up and get on board as these programs become more standard."

Tax: 'All the other districts I talk to face the same issues'

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Modifying the levy also helps pave the way to propose an increase in the future, Benedict said, after the fire district has more time to educate the community about the reasons for a higher property tax bill.

It will also allow the district to consolidate the budgeting process and open up funds for more general maintenance and supplies, Benedict said.

The vote was unanimous, but some board members had concerns that changing the name without changing the rate could cause confusion among voters.

"I'm concerned about changing the wording. With all these bond issues out, I don't want people to get confused. The most important thing is to continue with paying for a fire chief with this levy," board member Garry Smith said.

If residents do not vote to

renew the levy, the fire chief would be paid out of reserves for a year before the board either proposed another ballot measure to fund his position or found alternate funding.

Overall, Benedict said considering rate increases for the levy is just putting a bandage on a larger, long-term funding issue with the fire district.

Benedict is suggesting the board consolidate with other nearby fire districts to be more cost-efficient. If done correctly, he argues, reforming the district will make the department less reliant on bonds and levies. Cannon Beach has already started working with nearby Hamlet Fire District by doing combined training.

"There's more efficiency. Better emergency response, better training, more efficient operations," Benedict said. "It's a better bang for your buck. When you join together, it will decrease response

times and consolidate training. Instead of paying for two fire chiefs, you have one. You don't need two fire marshals."

But reforming a fire district is a lengthy and complicated process that would not come to fruition until the distant future, Benedict said. Until then, board members plan to hold a work session on Feb. 20 to discuss other long-term funding options to address issues like volunteer firefighter shortages and limited funds for aging equipment.

"All of the other districts I talk to face the same issues. They need money, and people don't want to pay more taxes," said board member Mark Mekenas. "We need to sit down and talk about what we need to do in the long run, otherwise, what kind of future do we have here? Small increases can help with some additional funds, but down the road? My God, we really have got to do something."



Checking equipment to ensure it is in working order is a daily task at the Cannon Beach fire department.

Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

FEBRUARY 20 Clatsop County District Attorney Josh Marquis

A Columbia Forum Presentation



Josh Marquis is about to start his 25th year as Clatsop County's District Attorney. First appointed by Gov. Barbara Roberts in 1994 after the recall and criminal conviction of his predecessor.

A graduate of the Honors College and Law School of the University of Oregon, he has spent most of his 37 years as a lawyer as a prosecutor, first in Eugene, then Newport, and as Chief Deputy DA in Bend before coming to Astoria. He also spent time as a newspaper reporter and speechwriter in Los Angeles and two years as a criminal defense lawyer. He lectures and teaches to lawyers and others across the nation and overseas and has been asked to testify four times before Congress. Marquis served as President of the Oregon District Attorneys Association and Vice President of the National DA's Association, on whose board he still serves 21 years later. He is married to City Councilor Cindy Price. For more than 20 years he's been a jazz programmer at KMUN and appeared in SHANGHAIED IN ASTORIA every year since 1994.

TO ATTEND:

For Members: Dinner & Lecture: \$25 each; Lecture only: no charge

For Non-Members: Dinner & Lecture: \$35 each; Lecture only: \$15 ea.

Appetizers will be available at 6 p.m. • Dinner will be served at 6:30 p.m.

The speaker will begin after the dinner service is complete and non-dinner members and guests of the audience take their seats.

Forum to be held at the CMH Community Center at 2021 Exchange St., Astoria.




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Wednesday February 14th from 1-4 p.m.
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Assistance League is a non-profit, all volunteer organization whose philanthropic programs promote the well-being and self-esteem of children and teens throughout Clatsop County. Their celebrated Accessorize Sale is on hiatus until 2019 but Assistance League will be hosting a pop-up shop at Vintage Hardware for the month of February. The fun shop will feature luxury accessories for the self and home and all proceeds go directly to their programs that clothe and support children in need in our community.



Accessorize
POP-UP SALE
"Help Clothe Kids"



Feb. 8th - Mar. 7th, Vintage Hardware
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For more information contact
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Pop Up Shop will have bins for community members to drop off new Children Books for ALCP Duffel Bag Program for Foster Children