

Warm Springs has first tribally-owned, full-time fire department in the Northwest

Plans to step up fire protection for the Warm Springs Reservation has gotten off the ground with the tribes hiring of a fire captain and five full-time firefighters to make up Warm Springs' first full-time fire department.

Jerry Huff of Madras, was hired as the first fire captain; and Fred Muniz, Nelson Zomont, Vernon Kennedy, Oswald Tias, and Danny Martinez are the firemen.

Of the firemen that were hired, two are tribal members and three are members of other tribes, although all are familiar with the reservation.

With the added positions Warm Springs is the first tribally owned and operated fire department in the Northwest and maybe even in the United States, but that couldn't be confirmed. Fire and Safety Officer Ray Rivero says optimistically, "I think we can have a model program soon."

The new fire department now has seven men, but Rivero feels more are still needed. "At least four (more men)," he said. "We have more vehicles than drivers. We need three shifts of nine men and that's to bring it up to minimum."

A home in Simnasho will be remodeled into a firehouse and have three shifts of two men. "That's why I need more men. I got two stations," Rivero remarked. He added that he's going to ask for more men in the 1981 budget and

feels they can be justified.

Work on the firehouse in Simnasho isn't going to start until construction of 23 homes begins so all the work can be done at one time. "Fire protection should've been there before construction," Rivero feels.

Kah-Nee-Ta's volunteer brigade will soon be upgraded. A H.U.D. grant will be used to supply needed equipment at Kah-Nee-Ta.

Before the tribes decided to hire fire-fighters Warm Springs had to rely on the Bureau of Indian Affairs to respond to fires. The tribal police department made the ambulance calls. Although the fire department still needs volunteers the full-time firemen's role will be to provide standard minimum response, working as a team.

Currently, the fire-fighters are going through Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training along with members of the police department. The training will involve 200 hours (seven weeks) of intensive fire department training. The vigorous class, held from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., has the firemen using most of their spare time for studying. About an hour each day they can be seen at the Community Center working out because a fire-fighter should be in good condition.

The firemen will also be going through all construction

going up on the reservation, presently Alice's Restaurant building and the houses. This is to get an inside view of how and what they are constructed of and to make tactical decisions in the event they burn.

After the seven weeks of trainings is up, Rivero is planning to send the firemen, one or two at a time, to an internship program, probably in the Portland area. "We'll send them to some busy firehouse," said Rivero, "where they can work alongside experienced firemen that have 10-15 years service." The men will be placed at different firehouses.

After the classroom instruction and internship, the firemen will be able to earn certification of "Firefighter I," the first step for which the state has different levels.

Zomont, who went from the Community Center to the fire department doesn't regret

leaving job where he worked mainly with children.

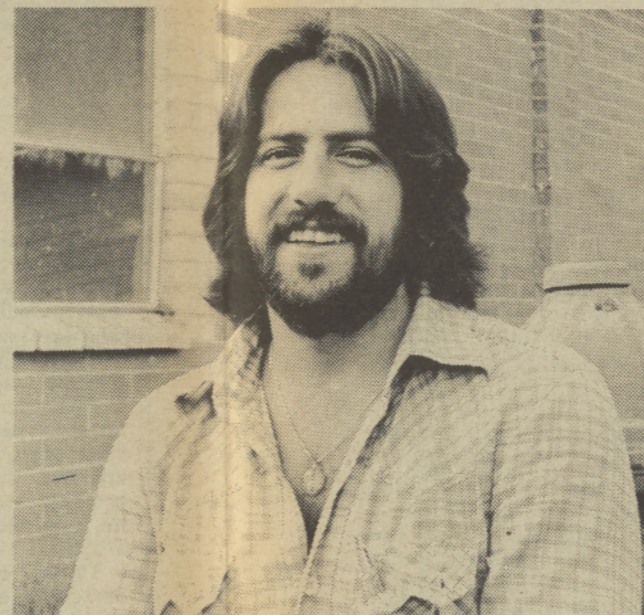
"Working with kids will always be for me," says Zomont, who is also coach of the minor league team, Warm Springs Chiefs. "I want to learn more ways to help people, being able to help in disasters. EMT class will help me as far as what's going on in the body."

"I like the direction of the chief, his attitude is of a leader," Zomont adds.

"It's still a caring job," says Muniz, who was a counselor for the Wilderness Camp program. "We're dealing more with the body. It's just one more step for me," Muniz says adding he's still working towards Indian counseling certification.

"I'm learning there's a lot more to putting water on a fire. It's a new program so it's a real challenge."

"Our chief is a well qualified man—a good person to be around," Muniz concludes.



Fire Chief-Ray Rivero



Firemen-l. to r. Oswald Tias, Nelson Zomont, Captain Jerry Huff, Fred Muniz, Danny Martinez, and Vernon Kennedy.

Text and photos by Roger Stwyer



In Training—Oswald Tias watches as the other firemen descend from the top of the fire department building. The firemen will go through an intensive seven-week training program.



Future Firefighters—Children from the Day Care Center with Wanda Jackson on a walk, stop to watch the new fire department practice climbing off a building.



Look Out Below—Fred Muniz, who gained some rock-climbing experiences as a Wilderness Camp counselor, is the first one off the top of the building. After getting down over the roof, the firemen found the rest of the way fairly easy.



Safety lessons—Fred Muniz, left, and Nelson Zomont, right, test their safety skills on Danny Martinez after classroom instruction.