

CANDIDATES from page 1A

plan, and put a capital replacement plan together. We learned a lot, and I think we were really successful there,” he said. “It’s a lot of the same issues that Western Lane and Siuslaw have. Really, all the same in fire departments around the country — you can’t get enough volunteers, maintaining vehicles is expensive. Everything is expensive.”

As to issues specific to Siuslaw, Schick brought up communication, and the possibility of the creation of a third entity, which would create a third, non-taxing organization that would govern certain aspects of SVFR and WLAD. The two emergency response organizations share an administration under an intergovernmental agreement (IGA).

“With Western Lane Ambulance and Siuslaw Fire and Rescue, how are they going to coexist?” he asked. “They’ve got that IGA where the fire department provides administrative leadership, but it doesn’t give as much input for Western Lane directors into things that are going on. But that’s just the form of the IGA. So do they form a third entity IGA? I think that is the way to go.”

He said the possibility of a merger would create too many problems, as the districts would have to look into the legality of merging a health district and a fire district.

One of the greatest strengths, and challenges, Schick sees in this region is its volunteer force.

“I think Siuslaw is a little unique because they have such a wide age range of volunteers, which is fantastic,” he said. “One gentleman has 39 years here and 49 years of experience. You can’t replace that experience, and for the younger people to see that, that’s great. You got to make sure your current volunteers feel valued — and that you’ve given them opportunities. It’s tough to maintain certifications.”

And it’s tough to maintain a volunteer workforce with current demographics.

“This is a problem around the country. There’s not as many young people that want to do it. There aren’t as many 30- or 40-year-olds that want to do it anymore. Both parents are working, you’ve got kids activities. It’s just really tough,” he said. “I started out as a volunteer 25 years ago. It was mostly blue collar, white collar, 30s, 40s. Very few young people. Now, your typical volunteer or recruit is going to be a young man or woman who is looking for a career job. And this is how they start. They want to come

here, get their training, get experience and then they’re gone. You have to accept that.”

Schick pointed out SVFR’s recruitment/retention officer as a step in the right direction, “But still, it’s going to be tough. The thing is, if a structure fire happens and you have 14 career people, that gets expensive. You can’t afford that. You have to have a volunteer base that are willing to do it and that are trained to be safe. And then you’ve got to keep replenishing those people.”

To do that, Schick said management has to get creative and involved.

“I’ve got no problems taking a Saturday and teaching HAZMAT classes. We’ll prepare you for the test. If you can’t make it this night, we’ll do it some other night. I’m more than willing to commit to recruit volunteers, if they’re willing to commit back to the community,” he said.

Ultimately, it’s an ongoing process.

“You can’t just say, ‘We’re done for the year, we don’t have to do anything more,’” Schick said. “You have to keep going. And I am impressed with Siuslaw Valley here. They’re doing their own academy, they’re bringing outside people in to train as well. That’s how you get the best, by knowing how the recruits have been trained. That’s the right way to go. And then you hire from your volunteers. If you have a career opening, you know who you’re hiring, you know their experience. You make those opportunities, and you make opportunities for training and other certifications. You just have to be widely creative.”

Keith Long

With almost 40 years in the business, Long brings a wide variety of experiences into the discussion. The current chief of Mountain View Fire Rescue, Long has also worked as a paramedic, flight paramedic and EMS educator.

When asked about what he felt is an area of improvement at SVFR/WLAD, he went straight to equipment.

“I think that’s something the fire district can do better,” he said. “I see equipment, I look at the exhaust systems for the engines. Some of the things need to be updated with the fire department. You have the right people here, it’s just a matter of putting a plan in place and following the plan.”

As to how to fix the issues, Long focused on funding.

“I think that we’re going to have to really look at the property tax that is being left on the table. Right now, there’s no capital improvement plan that’s been approved, that I

know of. No facilities plan, or fleet replacement plan. It’s on paper, but there’s nothing on any spreadsheet or anything financially. You’ve gotta plan

“I think Siuslaw is a little unique because they have such a wide age range of volunteers, which is fantastic. One gentleman has 39 years here and 49 years of experience. You can’t replace that experience, and for the younger people to see that is great. You have to make sure your current volunteers feel valued — and that you’ve given them opportunities.”

— Michael Schick, Siuslaw Valley & Western Lane’s choice for new chief director

for the future, because things are going to happen, engines are going to wear out, SCBAs are going to get old. Radios are going to get old. You have to have money in the bank to take care of your day to day operations and your long-term planning.”

This is not to say that Long would like to see new taxes. Instead, he would like to see SVFR and WLAD fully collect what the current levy allows.

“The current tax rate is \$1.14 per thousand. You can move that up to \$1.54. That would give you enough buffer to take care of most of the items you need to take care of. So, there would be no new taxes. Just the ones that you’re allowed currently, that’s what we’d like to see. I would like to get the fire district in better financial shape. And I think just by getting that extra \$700,000 a year, that would do it,” he said.

As for dispatch, Long said the department could have better EMD (emergency medical dispatch) codes.

“It’s so the crews actually know what is going on from an alpha to an echo, alpha being, ‘Hey, someone has fallen over, they need help.’ And then echo is ‘CPR in progress.’ I think some of that communication needs to be updated,” he said.

Long also stated that the department needed a 24-hour shift on the fire department side, though not right away. “I’m not saying in six months, I’m talking a couple years down the road,” he said.

He agreed that one of the largest issues facing WLAD and SVFR is communication.

“I would like to see that even more so both districts have a voice,” he said. “Right now it doesn’t seem or appear that way.”

As for the third entity concept, Long called it “a fantastic idea.”

“My whole philosophy is go thin, go easy, go the cleanest route for efficiency. Right now I think having two boards is inefficient. I would rather see one board, so instead of having 24 meetings, have 12. Everybody has a voice at the table. That’s where I want to see the collaboration.”

Long also believed that taking such a step could lead toward more collaboration between the two departments. While SVFR and WLAD have

been working toward integrating services ever since the inception of the IGA, Long would like to see more.

“I would like to see more cross training,” he said. “You have 11 members of the ambulance district that have firefighter backgrounds. Let’s get everybody together. It’s going to take work. I would like to see a lot more compatibility, a lot more working together.”

But, because of the staff at SVFR and WLAD, Long felt it was doable.

“The people are some of the best I’ve ever met. Some people have their agenda, they have their concerns, and that’s fine. But if you listen to their message, the fire department does a great job, the ambulance does a great job,” he said.

Paul Sullivan

Sullivan comes from Baltimore, and from how he puts it, getting things right in the Siuslaw region is easier than metropolitan areas, particularly because both SVFR and WLAD are special taxing districts.

“I think sometimes in busy, fast-paced departments, you don’t get to make the changes as quickly as often as they need to be because of bureaucracy,” he said. “In order to put new jobs into place, it’s got to go through legislation, instead of being able to just create, budget and hire the positions. Purchasing can take a year or two to get something.

“I will tell you right now, for us in Baltimore, a lot of the money goes to the police department because we have such a high crime rate. They need more money than the fire department needs. While there may not be a lot of money here, it does come quicker, and you’re not battling with other agencies for the same funding.”

But it’s the smaller budget of SVFR/WLAD that Sullivan sees as a problem.

“There needs to be an improved revenue stream. I don’t want to say raise taxes, because there is a set tax rate. But there are other ways to generate revenue.”

Sullivan focused on service-based feeds, such as charging for fire inspections,

which SVFR does not do in an effort to encourage use.

“We have a fire marshal here that goes out and does fire inspections, but there’s no cost of an inspection for a business,” he said. “Everywhere else in the country, a fire inspection costs to get done. So, you can generate income from fire inspections. But there’s no code enforcement that comes with any monetary penalty. So, why would a business want to correct a deficiency if there’s no penalty for not correcting a deficiency? So we do two things. First, we get the place in compliance, but we also generate some funding for that service.”

While Sullivan agreed that more money needed to be invested in the department, he also believed the community would back more funding.

“At the end of the day, sometimes increasing taxes is what you need to do, and can be done with the buy-in of the community if they understand what the improvement is and why it’s needed,” he said.

As for what the funds would go to, Sullivan also focused on what he felt was an outdated dispatch system.

“I learned today that the dispatch system is definitely different from what I’m used to seeing, and how calls are dispatched. And there’s a system in place already that everybody in the country is using, but two or three departments. The benefits of going to that dispatch system is astronomical in the delivery service.

“I responded on a call today where the information came out and it was bad. We all started toward one location, which wasn’t the location, it was somewhere else. If we had computer priority dispatch, that probably wouldn’t have happened. Today it wasn’t something that was life threatening and didn’t have a catastrophic result, but what happens if that happens one day?” Sullivan asked.

However, he did believe that the overall system of SVFR and WLAD is sound.

“I think right now, the system works,” he said. “The services are being delivered. There’s just more things you can do. And I think they’re already on the minds of the interim chief and some of the others. It’s just, how do you get those changes to take place? Transparency is important. If you do things being transparent, then I think you can be successful. I think a lot of people are reluctant for change because they don’t know why.”

tions chief, Jim Dickerson has seen up close what he feels are some of the challenges facing the organizations, and the triumphs.

“We have a ton of good people,” he said. “We have a really interesting call ratio and citizen base. It’s all great things, but we have some budgetary issues and we have the IGA and the third entity that’s coming up on the table.”

For Dickerson, the IGA is the future of WLAD and SVFR.

“I think that’s an excellent opportunity for the community to see fire and EMS working together as one team. The one-team concept, I think, is not in its infancy. We’ve been doing it since we’ve started, and it’s been going on for years. But now that we’re actually stepping forward with it, I think people are going to start seeing an increase in efficiency in both fire and EMS sides. We’re going to increase training and mutual work. I think it’s all leading to a certain point that — not going to say full operational merger — having the leads, especially the division chiefs, at the same level working for the same team is really going to help out with operations.”

As for issues with the organizations, Dickerson focused on funding.

“With those budgets, although they look very solvent right now, we have raising costs from health insurance and operating insurance. We’re also needing to fix fire stations and build additional ambulance corridors. We’re starting to outgrow some of the things that we have. We have a need for capital improvement plans, both facilities and vehicles on both sides.”

As the other candidates, Dickerson pointed to the third entity as a fix for some of the issues.

“My suggestion is, if we were to have that third entity, it’s clear where that money is going,” he said. “We can look at the tax revenues and how some of those are getting pushed around and make sure that we have a solid levy on the Western Lane side. Maintain those tax districts as they are right now, and keep the districts operating together, but still separate under that administrative IGA. And looking toward, in the future, more operational things coming up. I think that’s the smart way to play the economy for the community.”

Despite economic issues, Dickerson believes that the overall health and progress of SVFR/WLAD is sound.

“We are really upping our game on training,” he said. “Our current status of entry level firefighters is going up — We’re requiring all firefighters to be Firefighter One. We’re providing the internal EMR training, which is emergency medical responder, which is a step right before EMT (emergency medical technician). People are getting top-quality firefighters coming out the door. We really stepped up our game on vehicle operations. We’ve stepped up our game on EMS training, which you can see in the combined class with Western Lane for EMTs. So we’re really stepping out to provide that.”

While the future of SVFR/WLAD still has challenges, Dickerson believed that the foundation is strong.

“There’s nothing I want to tear apart right now and start putting back together,” he said. “We have solid foundations here. Good houses come from good foundations. If we continue to build on those, I think we’re going into a good direction, and by building on those foundations that are already set, it’s just better for the community and for the fire and EMS professionals.”

For more information on SVFR and WLAD, visit svfr.org and www.westernlaneambulance.com.



HOLLOWAY & ASSOCIATES, LLC

Certified Public Accountants

733 Highway 101, (across from Safeway) • Ph #541-997-3434



Karla D. Holloway
CPA



Rod McCulloch
CPA



Rick Yecny
CPA

We specialize in

Tax Strategies

Bookkeeping and Accounting Services

Payroll Services

Preparation of Tax Returns

for Individuals

Corporation

LLC's

Estates & Trusts

Business Consulting

Quickbooks Installation & Training



The CPA. Never Underestimate The Value.

Serving Florence for 40 years

Proud to be a Florence and Reedsport-Winchester Bay Chamber member.