

# Eckstine ready to relax

Firefighter, fire marshal retires after 30-year career

BY JON STINNETT  
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

In the wake of his retirement from South Lane County Fire and Rescue, Paul Eckstine is reevaluating at least one long-standing relationship.

"For 27 years, this phone has dictated my life," he said. "It will be nice not having it go off all the time, not missing so many things, but I've got enough friends to stay busy."

Eckstine said the cell phone and what it represents — calls for help by a rain-soaked highway in the wee hours of the morning, calls that interrupt birthday and anniversary celebrations or time with the grandkids — will now give way to a new set of priorities.

"There comes a time when a guy's got to relax a little," he said.

On Tuesday, supporters at South Lane

Fire commemorated the nearly 30-year career Eckstine has compiled as a firefighter, paramedic, division chief and fire marshal. In that time, he's assisted total strangers and close friends in some of their darkest hours, raising seven kids along the way.

"It's a great job," he said. "You get to help people. They're usually happy to see you and you know that when you get there, you're going to make a difference. The camaraderie that exists with the entire town is a great feeling."

Despite the ease with which Eckstine seems to go about his business, he said he didn't harbor the firefighter's dream at an early age.

"I never had an interest in it as a child," he said, recounting his upbringing in Dorena and a job at Bohemia Lumber Co. as a young man. "There was a structure fire when I lived on Main Street, and I didn't know what to do. I called 911, but I remember that feeling of helplessness that really bugged me, and I thought, 'maybe they need help.'"

Eckstine said he learned a lot from



photo by Mary Ellen "Angel Scribe"

**Paul Eckstine was recognized for his work with South Lane Fire and Rescue on Tuesday.**

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# Four file for Fire Board election

New board will look to maintain district's positive momentum

BY MATT HOLLANDER  
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

With four candidates and three open positions, there isn't much uncertainty heading into next month's South Lane Fire and Rescue Board elections. Adam Pelatt and Jennifer Radcliffe are running unopposed, while Dan Duffy has challenged incumbent board president Mike Caven.

Caven has served on the board since 2011, and he was elected president in 2013. He currently works as an engineer and paramedic in the City of Eugene Fire Department's Training Division. He previously served as a firefighter with South Lane for five years.

When Caven was first recruited to the board, he recalls that it was a desperate time for the District, which was still stabilizing from the merger of the Cottage Grove, Creswell and South Lane Rural fire districts in 2003.

"At that time, my plan was to either dissolve the district or see it to maturity," said Caven, who has lived in Cottage Grove since 2002. "The biggest problem was that the district lacked a master plan."

Since then, the fire district has added personnel, shored up its operating budget, found stable leadership in Chief John Wooten and drastically cut emergency response times.

"In Creswell, response times have dropped from 12 minutes to five minutes," Caven said. "When you consider that a fire

will double in size every minute until it reaches a free-burning state, seven minutes is huge. And that time means even more for the survivability of cardiac arrest."

Caven, 34, is also in the process of completing his bachelors in fire service administration.

"My experience on the board is part of what led me back to school," he said. "And now I have the opportunity to apply the things that I've learned, and to educate other board members."

With a second term, Caven said his objectives would be to stabilize the district's funding, and modernize its aging equipment.

According to Caven, the average lifespan of an engine is 15 years, and every engine in the district is older than that. He estimated it would cost \$2 million to purchase several new vehicles.

"When people see a shiny, red engine they typically don't think that it needs to be replaced, but it's what's on the inside that matters, and the maintenance costs for our older engines have certainly gone up," he said.

While the district is in a better place financially than in the past, it has not yet established a long-term funding plan, and one of the obstacles to that is a permanently low tax rate, Caven said. He said that the current board has discussed a bond levy, which could be on the November ballot.

"Two million would take up half of SLFR's annual operating budget. We've been looking at different options, but ultimately we think it will be a good idea

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# PERS, insurance changes aid SLSD budget committee

Budget cuts should be manageable, Supt. says

BY MATT HOLLANDER  
The Cottage Grove Sentinel

The state's \$7.255 billion K-12 education funding plan, signed by Governor Kate Brown on April 9, is still \$250 million short of what many Oregon educators had hoped. But South Lane School District Superintendent Krista Parent told the District's budget committee on April 20 that, thanks to some good decisions, the District is well positioned to make do.

While many other school dis-

tricts will need to make challenging cuts in the near future, South Lane is a mere \$112,000 away from balancing its \$30 million budget, Parent said.

In recent years, the district refinanced its obligation to the Public Employee Retirement System (PERS) at a much lower rate, and reduced spending on health insurance. While premiums are not going down, the district has made a more concerted effort to educate employees on the different package options, and many have elected more affordable coverage.

If not for these factors, the budget committee could be looking at a deficit of \$800,000, Parent added.

The budget committee will

meet for the first time on May 11. There is a second meeting scheduled for May 14 if members need more time to approve a budget; however, Parent said that the second meeting has not typically been needed.

And as the Oregon legislature approved the state's public schools budget much earlier than usual, the South Lane budget committee faces less uncertainty than in past years.

The district budget committee consists of Robert Ball, Keith Folkman, Judy Cunningham, Faye Stewart, Ben Price, Jennifer Perini and Tracy Durfee.

While the state has built a 50/50 split into the upcoming biennium budget, a 49/51 ratio has been standard because costs

typically rise from the first year to the second. Parent proposed to correct that split internally to reflect this historical norm.

The basis for the state's deviation, according to Parent, is to provide schools with more money upfront for large expenditures and keep the door open for additional, unexpected funds in the second year. However, she recalled that in the only other instance of a 50/50 split, the budget was cut, rather than expanded, in the second year.

After the presentation, budget committee members offered their support for the internally adjusted 49/51 split. The differ-

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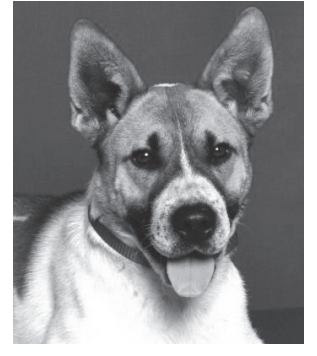
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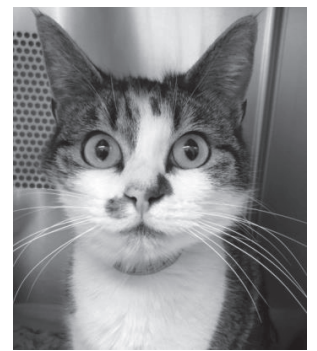
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