

Meet **LADDER 3249**

The department's flagship vehicle



ANDREW TONRY/FOR CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Ladder 3249 extends reach for Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District.

By Andrew Tonry
For Cannon Beach Gazette

There's a shiny new truck at the fire station.

In January, the Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District welcomed a custom-built, 36-foot-long, 50,000-pound, 500-hundred-horsepower Pierce Arrow XT ladder into the bay.

Christened "Ladder 3249," the department's flagship vehicle will be on call by mid-February.

The \$755,000 truck was paid for by a tax levy. It replaces a 1991 Beck telesquirt.

Besides the old Beck's increasing maintenance costs and insurance concerns, Ladder 3249's primary selling point was its 75-foot extendable ladder. With significantly increased height and range, Cannon Beach firefighters say they can reach the top of any building in town.

That wasn't the case with the old truck, which was limited in its reach, especially critical at hotels and larger homes. Once you were outside the collapse zone you couldn't reach," Lieutenant

Steven Moon said. "Rarely someone would be up that ladder."

The new ladder, with motorized extension, wider steps, guard rails, equipment mounts and an intercom, can carry up to 750 pounds.

"This is the shortest truck you can get with a 75-foot aerial," Moon said.

As short as it is, Ladder 3249 barely fits underneath the station's bay doors. It squeezes in because it was built to exacting specifications.

"This is custom all the way," Moon said. "With the size of our streets, we wanted a compact truck with the biggest ladder we could get."

"There are thousands upon thousands of options," he continued. "The sky's the limit. You get a huge book of specs — it has everything from the front windshield to rear bumper."

The old truck had fittings for three water hoses. Ladder 3249 supports six and adds increased length. It pumps up to 1,500 gallons per minute, and has the capability to spray two kinds of fire-retardant foam.

Ladder 3249 employs

'A great piece of apparatus'



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Interim Chief Jim Stearns, Lt. Steven Moon and Lt. Tom Misner.

bright, low-power LED lights, a more modern and robust communications system, increased cab size and

carrying capacity, enhanced safety features and an automatic transmission.

"It drives like a dream,"

Lieutenant Tom Misner said.

The vehicle and its specifications were selected by Misner, Moon, along with other volunteers and former Fire Chief Mike Balzer. Despite the allure of further options, Misner and Moon say Ladder 3249 contains only the essentials.

"We kept this thing as slim and trim as possible," Moon said. "We saved as much money as possible. No frills."

Passed on were options like computer-controlled ladder-docking and an onboard generator. In the case of the generator, they added a much cheaper, handheld model. In the case of the electronic docking, it just seemed frivolous.

"We don't even have air-conditioning on this truck," Moon said. "That saved \$8,000."

The Pierce brand was chosen, in part, because of the accessibility of an authorized service center in Eugene.

"Our old Beck truck was the last off their line before they went bankrupt," Moon said. "There was no factory support."

The department's engine

— a smaller water-pumper without a ladder — is also a Pierce.

Upon delivery, the manufacturer sent a representative for to conduct a day of training. Further instruction in ladder operation will follow.

"Anytime you get around the ladder the huge risk is power lines," interim Chief Jim Stearns said. "It has to be in their minds: 'Where are those overhead power lines?'"

The entirety of the primarily all-volunteer force will eventually become fluent in the new truck's operation.

"In a volunteer department like this everyone has to know all the different roles," Stearns said. "We strive for everybody to be on the same page, because you don't know who is going to show up on a call."

"It will make our jobs easier," Moon said. "This helps bridge the gap between personnel and capabilities."

"We do want to thank the community for the vote to pass this," Stearns added. "It's a great piece of apparatus that ought to serve this community for the next 25 years or so."

Lawsuit

Balzer from Page 1A

Residents have defended the former chief and complained about the way Balzer was treated by fire district directors, who locked him out of his office the morning after his dismissal.

Garry Smith, a board director, described the firing as "strictly business, not personal," and other directors questioned Balzer's administrative skills.

Susan Neuwirth, a Cannon Beach resident, has filed a recall petition to remove three of the board's five directors: President Sharon Clyde, Smith and Linda Beck-Sweeney.

Jim Stearns, of Hermiston, is serving as interim fire chief. The fire district board hopes to hire a new chief by June.

According to Balzer's lawsuit, board directors conducted a performance evaluation in the first quarter of last year that was very critical of Balzer's work.

Balzer claimed directors, in particular, chastised him for allowing his wife to criticize board directors on social media and other comments.

Balzer said the board set goals for him to accomplish by November that were "impossible to obtain" within that time frame and then "intentionally created a hostile work environment" before his firing.

Balzer said he has "suffered irreparable injury to his business and personal reputation, and will have serious difficulty finding substitute employment, particularly in the small coastal community in which he resides."

Cannon Beach seeks fire chief who can do it all

June timeline for hire 'is very doable,' if board isn't derailed

By Andrew Tonry
For Cannon Beach Gazette

If everything goes according to plan, the Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District Board of Directors hopes to hire and install a new Fire Chief by June.

The timeline, proposed at a work session Tuesday, Jan. 19, leaves little margin for error.

"I think it's very doable," said interim Chief Jim Stearns, who will lead the search. "But it's going to be a very busy time in here."

The timeline also supposes that an ongoing effort to recall three board members — including the board president — does not derail the process.

The June 1 target date coincides with the conclusion of Stearns' six-month contract. Should a new chief fail to materialize in that time, Stearns said he would remain available.

"I'm not gonna walk off and leave you high and dry," Stearns told the board.

This will be Stearns' third time directing a chief's hiring. Before retiring as a full-time chief in Hermiston, Stearns found his replacement. And in a situation similar to the one in Cannon Beach, Stearns led a search in Rogue River while acting as interim chief.

A little bit of everything

In guidelines put forth by Stearns and echoed by the board, Can-



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Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District Board member Garry Smith, left, and interim Chief Jim Stearns discuss hiring a new fire chief.

non Beach's next fire chief will need to do a little bit of everything.

Since arriving in Cannon Beach in November, Stearns came up with a saying to describe the fire department's myriad responsibilities: "If you can shoot it, taste it or cuff it, call the cops," Stearns said. "Fire does everything else."

"My first day here, we got dispatched for a tree across the highway," Stearns said. "Where I come from, I thought, 'why are we going out on a tree?'"

The reason quickly became clear — if the fire department didn't remove the tree, it might affect their ability to effectively respond to a call in that area. The nearly all-volunteer Cannon Beach Fire Department also assists in water rescues, emergency medical responses and more.

But the desired qualifications for a new chief go well beyond his competence in the field. Board

members said they wanted someone who could write grants, inspire volunteers, handle a slate of administrative duties, interface with the community and more.

"I think in a department this size you need everybody to be response capable," Stearns said. "When the whistle blows, we're all firefighters. The administration side has to be done confidently and well."

"We need somebody who does both," said board President Sharon Clyde.

Another qualification: a smooth, reassuring presence.

"Public relations is going to be huge for a while," Stearns said in a nod to the continued public furor over the firing of previous Chief Mike Balzer and the ensuing recall effort.

Filling the post

Stearns and the board also discussed different ways to fill the

position. Under consideration are a full-time chief fluent with administrative work, and part-time chief with administrative support.

However, the tax levy funding the chief's salary is only allocated for a single employee — the chief.

"To earmark those for just one position and a vehicle, you've kind of tied yourself down," Stearns told the board. The levy remains in place until 2017.

Stearns also discussed with the board the ups and downs of hiring in this particular locale.

"We're going to attract a chief to a small department like this that's either a first time chief and using this as a stepping stone," Stearns said. "Or you get somebody on the way down that's wanting to retire on the Oregon Coast but not ready to quit working. That could be a wonderful find, but it's got to be the right find."

"I think you're not going to attract a mid-career person here at that salary range," Stearns added. The full-time salary offered is in the neighborhood of \$70,000, which doesn't include an additional \$35,000-to-\$40,000 spent on insurance and benefits.

Stearns and the board hope to officially announce the opening Feb. 1. On this timeline they will advertise until March 15, and begin interviews in mid-April.

From his connections with fire departments throughout the state, Stearns has already been queried about the opening.

"We've got three viable candidates already interested in the position," Stearns said. "I think we'll have a whole lot more."