

Hamlet fire chief saluted for 40 years of service

By Katherine Lacaze
Seaside Signal

For 40 years, Bill Boone has volunteered his time to serve others through the Hamlet Volunteer Fire Department, gaining a profound and valuable knowledge of the community and eventually rising to the role of fire chief.

On April 11, Boone was recognized for his service during the monthly Hamlet community potluck dinner, held at Hamlet's community center, with about 60 people in attendance. As a thank you, the community gave him an antique fire nozzle that was polished and mounted on a piece of wood containing a placard engraved with a thank you to Boone for dedicating "40 years and counting" to the community. The goal was to surprise him with the gift, and they pulled it off, Boone said.

Volunteer firefighter Justin Brown initiated the idea of honoring Boone at the dinner, and the community embraced it.

"I've been on the department for a few years and started to see how much work he put into it," Brown said. Once the community started discussing awarding Boone for his service, they "agreed it should have been done a long time ago," he added.

Boone, who grew up in Portland, joined the fledgling fire department in 1975, a year after he moved to the area.

"I volunteered with them at that point, and then I just stayed with it," he said.

When he first joined the department, there was a strong sense of community in the town. Some of that was lost over the years, he said, but there has been a resurgence of community spirit, including the reinstatement of potluck dinners, which are held the second Saturday of each month, and holiday events.

Boone did not have prior firefighting experience, but he joined the department because he was looking for adventure in his life as a young man. He stuck with it because he has "a personal conviction that everyone needs to give back to their community in some way or another."

"There are a million different ways to do it, but this is just the way I've chosen," he said.

He was chairman of the Hamlet Rural Fire Protection District board in the 1980s, a position he relinquished when he was promoted to chief in 1991.

The fire department runs about 100 calls per year, with the biggest source of activity being emergency medical response to motor vehicle accidents on U.S. Highway 26. The department also provides mutual aid to Cannon Beach and Seaside.

The department has about 10 members on the roster. Boone said they could use



Paul Weaver, chairman of the board for the Hamlet Historical Schoolhouse, left, presents Hamlet Volunteer Fire Department Chief Bill Boone with a special award.

PHOTO SUBMITTED BY SHELLY CLOOTEN

more, even though there is a high participation rate. All members including Boone are volunteers. In fact, he is one of the last unpaid fire chiefs in the state.

He gives between a few to 20 hours per week, on average, serving the department. Since "the job is much larger than I have time to do," he said, he focuses on prioritizing responsibilities. Nevertheless, he has enjoyed his time with the department.

"It's been a real positive thing in my life," he said.

Not only has he spearheaded the fire department,

but he's also managed his business successfully and raised two kids.

"It's quite impressive what he's done," Brown said.

Boone helped expand the department's equipment from what originally was at truck, a jeep and some military surplus to what is now two facilities for housing trucks, a new pumper and a rescue rig. He also has overseen grant writing and fundraising, crucial to keeping the department going.

From the community's perspective, Brown said, "generous fails to give the

connotation of what he's done for us." Boone understands the history of the community and knows each person's property, health, age and their ability to evacuate their property safely in the event of a fire or other incident, which helps the department respond appropriately.

"He has an intimate knowledge of how things work out there and it's very beneficial to those of us on the fire department, as well as those of us in the rest of the community," Brown said. "The life and experience he's had here for 40 years is invaluable."

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