

Firefighting course can help students toward career position

Chairman Willis Meeuwesen opened the Banks School Board meeting January 10 by welcoming the audience, saying it was "nice to see a full house."

Fire Chief Brian Coussens introduced Banks Fire Department training officer Levi Eckert and started a presentation on the Firefighter program. Coussens told the board that students must apply for the program as if for a job. For some of them it is the first time they have filled out a job application or had an interview. Students must be juniors or seniors with at least a 2.5 Grade Point Average and excellent attendance. They must also provide references, pay a \$50 fee and pass a drug screen and physical exam. All books, materials, uniforms and turnouts are provided by the department, bringing the total cost for the class to about \$950 per student. The program is limited to ten students.

The program teaches life skills, Coussens explained, particularly civics, by offering experiences that include being part of a team, giving back to the community and working in a professional environment with adults. Eckert said that students learn compassion by observing real-life crisis situations, not television re-enactments or drama. Students also learn CPR, advanced first aid, rescue skills, fire prevention, accident prevention and chemical awareness. Successful completion of the program will earn 14 Portland Community College credits the first year, an additional nine PCC credits during their senior year if they started as juniors, and national-

ly recognized firefighter certification.

Much of this credit is transferrable to other institutions, Coussens said, a major savings in tuition expenses. While many students participate only during their senior year, several have completed, or are enrolled in the second year of the program.

Students receive certification as firefighters by Christmas of their first year in the program. After being certified, many of the students also join the fire department and respond to local calls as volunteers. Banks High School Principal Jim Foster said that he was surprised to see so many familiar faces when he attended a drill. Several students who have graduated are still active in the fire department, with some even commuting from Corvallis for drill.

Students also work with other firefighters to teach fire prevention and awareness to elementary students, Coussens said, greatly increasing the effectiveness of the program because younger students identify with the older students. Chief Coussens thanked the district for the opportunity to provide the program. He will be meeting with district administrators to ensure that the class is meeting student needs. He would like to encourage more students to join in their junior year and receive the full advantage of the program.

Insurance Report

Amy Hanson, of Waltz, Sheriden, Crawford (WSC), summarized the annual insurance report for the board, saying that the major activity of the last year was refining the policy covering facility use. Unlike the last several years, the insurance market appears to be stabilizing, according to Hanson. When the Special Districts Association of Oregon (SDAO) opened their insurance pool to school districts in 2003, the cost decreased by about 12.5 percent. SDAO provides insurance for many fire districts and other special districts.

Hanson told the board that WSC does not receive contingency income and operates strictly on a commission basis. National media reported in December that some agencies were engaging in bid rigging, but WSC's interest is in placing their clients with the best possible insurance to meet their needs, according to Hanson.

New Policies

Superintendent Marilyn McGlasson introduced two policies to help the board develop budgets with a new superintendent. The policies define two items included in school (and other government) budgets — the operating contingency and the unappropriated ending fund balance. McGlasson explained that, without a written policy, the board is "somewhat adrift" when determining what these amounts should be. Meeuwesen noted that over the last several years of decreasing state sup-

port, the ending fund balance has been "whittled away, all revenues were expensed." The board engaged in a lively discussion as they struggled with the need for such policies. A

second draft of the policies will be presented next month.

In other business, McGlasson reported that the district is compliant with all 22 standards required by the state.

Int'l Soup Festival, February 5

The second annual International Soup Festival will be on Saturday, February 5, from 3:00 to 7:00 p.m. in the Banks Elementary School cafeteria, on South Main Street in Banks.

The International Soup Festival will feature live music from several professional musical groups such as The Heatherlands playing Celtic folk songs. Homemade soups will include English Vegetable Beef, Italian Tortellini, German Potato Bisque and All American Tex-Mex Chili.

"Attendees can support a community event, learn more about the Sound Stage Project, and listen to live music while enjoying a smorgasbord of all-you-can-eat homemade soups from around the world," said Tracey Rowatt, Vice Chairperson of the Foundation.

This family friendly festival is open to all ages. Tickets at the door are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children age 12 and younger. Advance tickets are also available at a discounted price

of \$8 for adults and \$4 for children. Call Charlotte Cline, 503-324-9382 for advance tickets.

The Soup Festival is hosted by the Banks Community Foundation, a non-profit organization committed to enhancing cultural, social and economic development in the Banks community. Local businesses have joined with the Foundation to sponsor the event.

The Foundation, in partnership with Rural Development Initiatives Inc. and Diversity Corporation, has produced a feasibility study for a "world class" motion picture sound stage and back lot facility to be built in the Banks area. The Foundation is dedicated to the clean industry of filming, which in turn creates more jobs, increases education, cultivates cultural arts and brings the arts to the City of Banks and surrounding areas.

For additional information about the festival or the Foundation please log onto <ww.w.banksfoundation.org>.

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