

# Felton's new fire chief loves his job

By JOE ROJAS-BURKE  
Sentinel correspondent

FELTON — In spit-polished boots and the sharp-creased uniform of his trade, Felton Fire Chief Don Ramos leaned back in a recently donated office chair and assessed his first month with Felton's 30 men and women volunteer firefighters.

"I have been extremely impressed with the quality of the people," said Ramos, "These people are dedicated.

"I'm coming from the fifth largest fire department in the state of California to one of the smallest," said the 28-year veteran and a battalion chief of the San Jose Fire Department.

On Jan. 8, the 50-year-old Ramos took over the Felton command from long-time fire chief John "Mac" McDonnell, now retired.

Ramos was selected from 11 other applicants for the \$36,000-a-year position, according to Wayne Dennis, member of the Felton Fire Department board of directors. Dennis praised Ramos for his "professionalism and his experience."

Ramos has been a firefighter since he was in his 20s. He joined the San Jose department while studying at San Jose State University to be a teacher. After earning his teaching credential,



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

New Felton fire chief Don Ramos came from San Jose.

Ramos faced a choice between continuing with the fire department or going into teaching.

"It didn't take me long to fall in love with fire fighting," Ramos recalled.

Ramos and his wife Marilyn have five children. The couple live in San Jose, but hope to find a home soon in Felton. Ramos said, "one of the the most beautiful areas on the face of the

earth."

He is an energetic man quick to praise the firefighter's life and work.

"There isn't a day goes by and I don't look forward to going to work," said Ramos, "and firefighters share my feelings — we help people.

"You know the difference between us and doctors?" he asked, "Doctors get paid more, but we

put our lives on the line."

In one of three books he's written on firefighting, Ramos likens his profession to "a combination of boxing and chess."

A firefighter, like a boxer, must be physically tough, he said. And like a chessmaster, he's always thinking several moves ahead.

A former sprinter at San Jose State, Ramos stays fit these days running 25 to 30 miles a week. He has completed four marathons, and a so-called "tin-man" triathlon event including running, biking and swimming.

Ramos enjoys recounting the stories of his profession. Asked to share a favorite, Ramos settled into his chair, smiled and thought of a simple one.

He was only 24 or 25, he said, and fairly new to the department. Responding on a medical call he found a woman speechless with panic, clutching a baby in one arm and pointing down a hall with the other. Ramos rushed to the room and found the woman's other infant, blue from lack of oxygen. With quick and careful mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, the young Ramos saved the child's life.

"When you save a life there's no feeling like that," he said, "Donald Trump with all his money can't go out and buy that feeling."