

# Computers in the firehouse

## New Aptos chief pushes high-tech

By LANE WALLACE  
STAFF WRITER

After he got hooked on computers three years ago, Chuck Mornard of the Aptos-La Selva Fire District wanted to get his fellow firefighters interested in them.

Mornard brought his own Macintosh computer to the station and plugged in some computer games, hoping the firefighters would become intrigued with the machines in the no-pressure atmosphere of the games.

It worked. The firefighters started playing the games in their off-duty hours. Then they started writing letters on them, Mornard said.

It wasn't long before some of the firefighters started using the computer for more complicated tasks, he said. Mornard, who was appointed fire chief last month, was a captain when he first brought the computer to the station.

Mornard's next step was to persuade the fire district to buy its own computers. The district's system then consisted of a word processor for the secretary.

Mornard got the support of then-chief Al Forbes before going to the board of directors.

"It was a hard sell," Mornard said, adding that the directors are expected to be careful when spending large sums. By mid-1988, the board approved the computer purchase.

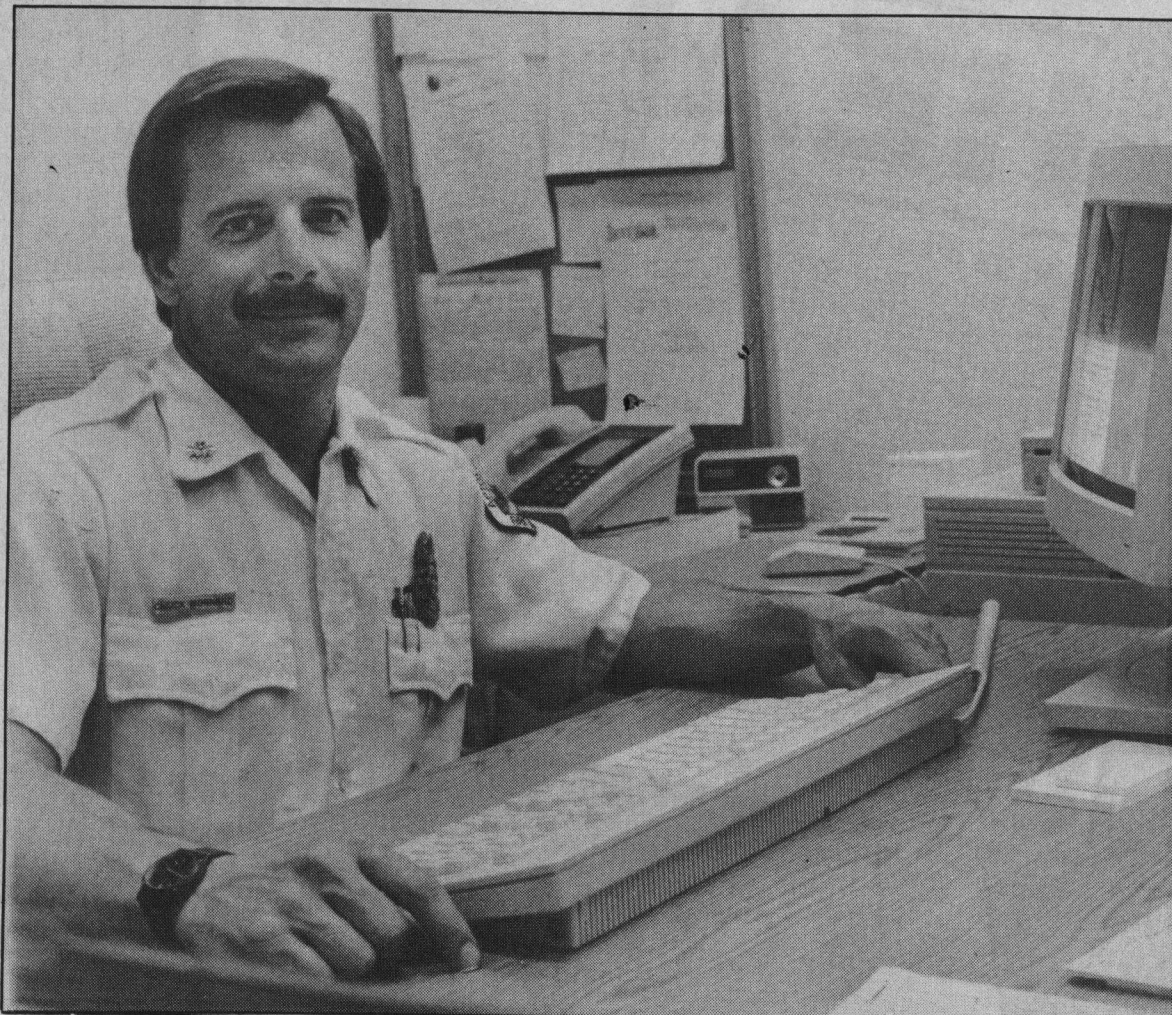
Over the next year and half, the district bought \$50,000 worth of computer equipment. Now, said Mornard, all 33 members of the staff use computers. Firefighters use them on occasion, while administrators use them as a basic tool of the job.

"We've got five or six computer nerds" on the staff, "and I'm one of them," Mornard said with a laugh.

"The only problem is we don't have enough computers."

Mornard said he would ask for \$25,000 for additional computers in the coming year's budget. The present system is in such demand that "we've got guys using them up until 1 a.m.," Mornard said.

The computer's uses include keeping records of hydrant locations and maintenance, firefighter schedules, budgets and a block-by-block record of what



Diane Varni

Chuck Mornard poses with one of his favorite tools.

## Firefighter finds his niche in Aptos

Before he was named chief of the Aptos-La Selva Fire Protection District last month, Chuck Mornard said he was looking for a chief's job elsewhere.

Mornard had risen quickly through the ranks in the last 3½ years, going from captain to administrative captain to battalion chief, and he's nearing completion of a master's degree in public administration.

But when he was named chief in Aptos, Mornard put aside thoughts of going somewhere else.

"There's no reason to leave," said Mornard, 38, who grew up in Ben Lomond and has been with the fire district since 1978.

"I can put in a good 20 years," in Aptos, Mornard said. He is the first Aptos fire chief in 20

years to work his way up through the ranks.

Mornard replaces Chuck Streeter, who resigned under pressure in March after he made purchases without going through the district's bidding procedure.

Mornard's first firefighting experience was as a volunteer in Ben Lomond in 1976, after he had returned home from college at Sacramento State University.

Mornard said he took to firefighting and rescue work right away.

"I liked the team aspect," said Mornard, who played football and rugby at Sacramento. He spent one season as a graduate assistant for the Sacramento State football team, but decided not to pursue a coaching career.

"I saw all the pain and suffering they (coaches) go through," he said with a grin.

You won't see Mornard out on the rugby field any more. In his last try at the sport four years ago, "I got too busted up," he said.

Mornard was hired as an Aptos firefighter in 1978, but his career almost didn't last long. He was hired on a temporary basis and laid off six months later. He was rehired a year later and has been with the district since.

Ray Garcia, chairman of the fire district board of directors, said Mornard has "sterling qualifications."

"He's been the backbone of the department," Garcia said.

—Lane Wallace

buildings are in the fire district.

"Our productivity is top quality," in large part because of the computers, Mornard said.

When fire district directors were negotiating pay with the staff last year, Mornard was able to give them a printout spelling out the district's cost for various levels of pay and benefits. The job would have taken days or weeks by hand,

said board chairman Ray Garcia.

"He (Mornard) did it on the computer in a couple of hours," Garcia said.

There are computers at each of the district's three stations, as well as the administrative offices. Aptos-La Selva can also communicate with 500 other fire departments that are part of a nationwide network.

Mornard said before he took training classes, he felt intimidated by computers. Among the current fire district staff, he said, "you're intimidated if you don't use them."

Firefighters now go through a week of training on the computers, and Mornard urges them to become proficient. Mornard's advice is "get used to them and make yourself invaluable."