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50-year FIRE & FIRE PROTECTION party for fire district

BY TERRI MORGAN
Special to the Mercury News

The Zayante Fire Department will celebrate 50 years of community service Saturday with an open house and a birthday bash.

The volunteer fire department, which serves about 5,000 people within a 13-square-mile district in the San Lorenzo Valley, was founded July 17, 1942, by residents living in the rural canyons of Lompico and Zayante. Initially funded by community donations,

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the department opened for business in a 1,200-square-foot garage that was built by volunteers on a donated parcel at Quail Hollow and East Zayante roads.

"We've come a long ways in 50 years," said Chief Ken Boynton, who has been with the department for 28 years. "I go back to when there was 10 to 12 members and just one fire truck.

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Zayante firefighters chalk up half-century

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station with running water," he added. "The community support has been very gratifying."

That support has enabled the department to grow through the years. In 1957, residents approved a property tax assessment measure to help support the fire district. Those tax dollars allowed the department to expand its protection efforts beyond fires. Today, Boynton estimates that 75 to 80 percent of the 190 calls for help the department averages each year are related to medical problems, home emergencies and vehicle accidents.

About five years ago, residents overwhelmingly approved a tax increase to pay for the new fire station on East Zayante Road. Like the original station, the new center was built by volunteers, largely with donated materials.

The department started moving into the new building, which doubles as a community center, late in 1989.

Last June, district voters approved yet another parcel tax to pay for new firefighting vehicles.

"In a rural area, people are more likely to be involved in helping their neighbors," said volunteer firefighter Jack Unger. "We're the first ones to respond to any emergency, and that's led to a lot of community support."

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

The public is invited to a free open house at the Zayante Fire Station, 7700 East Zayante Road, 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday. A birthday dance will be held 8 p.m. to midnight with a country-Western band providing the entertainment. Dance tickets cost \$5 apiece, and will be available at the door. For more information, call the Zayante Fire Department at (408) 335-5100.