

They're not in it for the money

Volunteers are crucial to Zayante Fire Department

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ZAYANTE — Payday is approaching for Zayante's Fire District volunteers, but they won't be needing any help carrying home their paychecks. The first week of December, firefighters will collect their annual stipend for answering some 232 calls this year — \$5 per call.

"If they're out there for two hours or if they're out there for eight hours, they still get the \$5," said Capt. Joe Garbez.

That's not all, of course. Firefighters also get \$3 for every drill they attend, unless they also sit on the Board of Directors, like Barbara Macallair does.

"I don't get the \$5 per call," Macallair said. "That would be a conflict of interest — I go on the calls for nothing."

Macallair's positions on the board and in the field give her an interesting perspective on firefighting, she said.

"It's kind of like having a liaison on the board, having a director in the field," said Medical Engineer John Justice, another volunteer who has been spending his spare time helping to finish the new firehouse on East Zayante Road.

Zayante Fire District volunteers are spending a lot of hours working at the new place these days. They began moving in to the new building, situated on more than four acres along East Zayante Road, in June but there's still a lot of finishing work and unpacking to do. Piles of towels, blankets and first aid equipment are still stacked up against barrels of equipment on the second floor of the facility. Interior walls still need hanging, and major work is yet to come on the grounds outside.

"The guys have all been talking about an exercise machine," said Chief Ken Boynton. "I said 'great, I've got a hoe and shovel right outside, and there's a lot of work to do!'"

The firefighters, engineers, auxiliary members and even some administrators have been digging ditches, wiring, and pouring cement to finish the new firehouse, Boynton said.

"The whole parking lot lighting project has been done at zero taxpayer expense," he said. "We dug all the trenches, laid the conduit and backfilled those ourselves."

There won't be a brass fire pole to slide down, though.

"That was \$5,000 and we couldn't afford to put it in," said Garbez, pointing to a hole in the floor of the new facility. "The pole was going to over here but now they've turned it into a dumbwaiter."

Cost-saving measures taken by the Fire District have kept the cost of the new facility low, Boynton said.

"The taxpayers are getting a \$2-million building for about \$60,000 because of a lot of volunteer hours," he said. The community passed a tax bond issue for the new firehouse in November 1987 with an overwhelming 92.7-percent voter approval.

"We have 25 of the finest people in the Valley here," Boynton said. "We're the lowest-budget Fire



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Ken Boynton, Barbara Macallair, Joe Garbez, John Justice and Kathy Bowers aren't making money off their Fire Department paychecks.

District in the whole county, and it's the fact that they're all volunteers that makes it work, because there's no way this district could support a paid Fire Department."

Firefighter Nick Pagnini said that community support is key to the success of the Zayante Fire District.

"People in the community support it, not just with their dollars but with their attitudes," Pagnini said. "To have the public come back and support you is what it's all about, really."

The Zayante Fire District's 28-member auxiliary also helped raise money, by selling rocks, parts of the floor and holding a flea market.

"We raised \$1,300 to finish off the year and to buy some medical equipment," said Kathy Bowers of the auxiliary. "We also hold the yearly pancake breakfasts — this year we raised \$1,500 at the pancake breakfast."

The Zayante firefighters are no strangers to hard work. The 232 calls they've answered this year, which ends for them on Oct. 31, included 23 structure fires, 72 medical emergencies and 61 automobile accidents.

"We actually had one of your traditional cat-up-a-tree calls recently," Boynton said. "It was 12:30 in the morning. There wasn't too much we could do, though. I just told them that nobody's ever found a cat skeleton in a tree, and believe me, when we all go away that cat is going to come down!"

They all went away, and the cat *did* come down. Boynton said about 75 percent of the calls are medical in nature, some happy and some sad.

"We had a baby with SIDS that was on a monitor," Boynton said. "One of our firefighters was on the scene, and he got the baby started breathing again. By the time everybody else got

there, he had the baby breathing and stable."

That firefighter, Tom Schuman, lived near the baby's house and was familiar with the situation — the hospitals let the Fire Department know whenever a baby is being monitored in the district — and was able to get to the scene quickly to turn a tragic situation into a thankful one. That wasn't the case with another little one in the area, Boynton said.

"Probably one of our saddest calls was the little baby that was assaulted and drowned, the one that's just gone to trial recently," Boynton said. "Bob Dunbar was the first one there, and we gave it our best shot but it just wasn't good enough."

Not everyone has what it takes to be a Zayante Fire District volunteer, Boynton said.

"The \$3 per drill and \$5 per call just barely covers expense, especially shoes," Boynton said. "Every firefighter will ruin at least one pair of shoes each year, out there in the muck."

Then there are the interruptions.

"It's the middle of mealtime, the pager goes off and they're up and out," Boynton said. With firefighting clothing — "turnout gear" — at the ready, boots tucked into the ends of pants, firefighters wear pagers constantly and are always on call.

"They pull up their pants, put on a helmet and out the door," Boynton said.

Young people can make it happen, too, Boynton said. The district has a cadet program for 16- to 18-year-olds interested in firefighting which runs them through the training program and actually gives them in-field experience.

"A lot of our 16-year-olds go to car accidents, usually involving drunken drivers," Boynton said. "On the scene, they see these people making fools of themselves — that's a lesson you can't duplicate elsewhere."