

SJM 5/22/92 B-1 FIRES & FIRE PROTECTION

Vote us new trucks, Zayante fire volunteers ask

BY TERRI MORGAN
Special to the Mercury News

Volunteers at the Zayante Fire Department are out on the streets in a last-ditch attempt to convince voters to allow them to replace the oldest firefighting fleet in Santa Cruz County with more modern vehicles.

"I hate to use the term 'streetwalking,' but our firefighters are literally walking door-to-door throughout neighborhoods," said Fire Chief Ken Boynton.

The department also has stepped up its telephone campaign in hopes of convincing the district's 2,022 registered voters to say yes to measures A and B when they vote in the June 2 election.

Measure A calls for homeowners in Lompico and Zayante to pay an additional \$35

a year in property taxes to help pay for new firefighting vehicles. Measure B would allow the district to collect and spend the funds. Measure A also calls for a \$20 tax increase on undeveloped parcels, and a \$55 increase on commercial property.

Measure A requires approval by a two-thirds majority, and would be subject to voter renewal every four years.

The 26-member volunteer department relies on four fire trucks to protect the 13-square-mile district in the heavily wooded San Lorenzo Valley, where it responds to about 200 calls a year. The oldest vehicle in the fleet is 35 years old, and the department's newest truck was purchased in 1967. The two other fire trucks,

which Boynton calls the department's first-line fire engines, were purchased in 1963.

The department also has four other support trucks, including a command vehicle and a medical response vehicle, that volunteer firefighters paid for out of their own pockets.

Passage of the two measures, and repeated renewals, would allow the district to raise about \$80,000 a year for the next 24 years. If they are approved, the department could replace all eight vehicles by purchasing a new one every three years, Boynton said.

In November 1987, residents approved a similar property-tax increase, which allowed the Zayante Fire Department to build a new fire station. Completed in ear-

ly 1990, the new station earned the district a more favorable fire rating, which saved homeowners 20 percent to 50 percent on their fire insurance bills.

Although no one has organized a campaign to oppose the measures, Boynton says a victory is not assured, due both to the economy and the demographics of the district. Because housing prices in Lompico and Zayante are among the lowest in the county, the area has attracted many young couples who are just starting to raise families. A number of elderly people living on fixed incomes also call the district home.

"If you're just squeaking by as it is, every nickel is already committed at least twice," he said. "You have to pay your PG&E bill, but this is one place you can say no."