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East Contra Costa Fire Protection District



“East Contra Costa Fire Protection District’s 2017 Accomplishments”

ECCFPD Fire Chief Brian Helmick

Brentwood- I would first like to wish everyone a Happy New Year and hope your holiday season was enjoyable while allowing you a chance to reset before the busy year ahead.

In April of 2017, I was named the Interim Fire Chief for the East Contra Costa Fire Protection District and was appointed by the Board of Directors as the permanent Fire Chief in October. As I worked on getting up to speed with all the functions of the Fire Chief position, I found that the year was really about working to stabilize our service level and establishing a solid foundation upon which to build future service improvements.

When I started in April of 2017, it was apparent that there were many systems and processes that needed to be improved. Initially, my primary objectives were addressing the District's retention challenges and assuring that the District operated as efficiently as possible with the revenues available. This required transitioning the District to a three-station operation model (although the current District Master plan calls for 9 stations to adequately serve the District).

The District has a long road ahead in its effort to improve service to our customers. I believe the District's staff has made good strides and begun to build a solid foundation for future growth. I am a firm believer in working as a team. What we have done over the past nine (9) months within the District internally is give our line-personnel additional responsibility and a voice in the future of the District. Specifically, we created several line staff committees where decisions can quickly move up the chain of command to accomplish tasks much faster. Some of the District's internal committees include: operations committee, technology committee, public relations / information (PIO) committee to name a few. These committees not only improve communications but ultimately improve the level of service the District provides to the communities the District serves.

Here is a summary of some of our 2017 accomplishments:

- **Internal Audit Discovers Additional Funding:** as the new Fire Chief, one of the first priorities was to understand the District's financial processes and assure the District was operating as efficiently as possible with the revenue that is provided to

the District. After many countless hours, meetings, and seeking professional assistance, \$6.2 million in one-time funding was identified from the past three budget cycles. These monies will be used on one-time expenses in the near future, including facility improvements and equipment replacements. As of this notice, the District has not utilized any of the \$6.2 million one-time funds and we will not do so until all external District audits are complete. In addition to identifying these onetime funds, the District has established a balanced budget that is sustainable for at least the next ten (10) years.

- ***Improved Capital Replacement Funding:*** We have established a facility and equipment based capital reserve funding program and are in the process of replacing worn equipment and refurbishing our long-neglected facilities. In the near future I will begin to share how antiquated the District's infrastructure (stations, equipment, engines) is and what challenges the District will have as we work to increase services.
- ***Restructured the Organization:*** We have successfully transitioned to a three-station operation model and increased administrative staffing. This has provided a strong financial base to build future improvements on and assures adequate personnel to guide the District on its path to improved service levels. The addition of administrative staff will assure we complete budgeting and auditing functions in a timely manner, move forward on developing a service improvement plan, and stabilize our current service level.
- ***Improved Communications:*** in 2017, as a District, we began to take control of our own messages and sharing our story with the citizens we serve. We invested heavily in re-launching our own website (www.eccfpd.specialdistrict.org) where citizens can now live stream board meetings and obtain relevant and up to date information on the District. In addition, we have launched several new and updated social media pages on behalf of the District. The Social Media channels now available for citizens to get relevant and up to date information about the District are:
 - **Facebook**
<https://www.facebook.com/EastContraCostaFireProtectionDistrict>
 - **Instagram** https://www.instagram.com/east_contra_costa_fire/
 - **YouTube**
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUo1LReabUPEcz5BL0Awn5g>
 - **Twitter** <https://twitter.com/eccfpd>
 - **Nextdoor**
- ***Partnered with California Fire Foundation to supply aid to victims:*** ECCFPD, in cooperation with International Association of Fire Fighters Local 1230 and the California Fire Foundation, can now provide emergency financial assistance to fire and natural disaster victims. The goal is to provide immediate short-term support in the aftermath of a fire or other natural disaster which displaces victims.

- **Public Outreach:** Our firefighters have begun visiting schools, preschools and attended many community events as well as hosted a series of our own events such as fire station open houses, Santa visits, and health and safety fairs. This was aimed at becoming more visible to the public. 2017 was just the start; in 2018 we have a calendar full of events we will be participating in.
- **Station 53 Name Change:** To better reflect a District identity, we changed the identifying number of Station 93 to Station 53 to ensure all stations in Battalion 5 were in the same numeric sequence. Upon additional station growth, those stations will also be in the 50 series.
- **Strike Teams Established:** For the first time in more than a decade, our District was able to assist other fire districts on major fire calls. In a period of two months, our District sent an engine in October to the Napa/Sonoma County Fires. In December, we sent an engine to Southern California to the Creek Fire in Los Angeles County and the Thomas Fire in Ventura/ Santa Barbara counties. The crews worked to save the Wildlife Way Station north-east of Los Angeles and protected several hundred exotic animals.
- **New Turnouts:** You may have noticed a new look to our firefighters as they recently switched to black turnouts (Protective uniform clothing). Our old turnouts are at the point of not meeting safety requirements. As of this release, all personnel's turnouts are being replaced as part of the new capital replacement funding program. Traditionally, we have worn tan turnouts, but the black ones were something our line personnel wanted, plus the color change was a cost neutral decision.
- **Firefighter Retention:** Late in 2017, our fire board approved a new union contract which includes a pay raise that more fairly compensates our firefighters for the lifesaving work they perform. Although we are still the lowest paid, among other surrounding fire districts across the Bay Area, the gap has significantly closed which should help with our retention issues. The new contract also includes a 50%-50% sharing of future health care costs for active and retired fire fighters. This will significantly reduce the cost of our healthcare liability.
- **Critical Incident Management:** Firefighting is a demanding profession and it can take a toll on our firefighters. In 2017 the District worked to improve the Districts Critical Incident Management and Peer Support team and brought on a Voluntary Fire Chaplain and mental health professionals to provide support to our members.
- **Planning for the Future:** The District is well on its way to developing a strategic implementation plan for improving the level of fires service within the District. We have retained a legislative consultant to establish a relationship with the state legislature, are in the process of retaining a strategic planning consultant, and will be developing a long-term funding and implementation plan to increase fire district services in the future.

These are just some of the highlights and achievements the District accomplished in 2017 and we look forward to improving the District in 2018. In 2018, we have many initiatives on our plate which include potentially moving to a five-member elected fire

board, developing a strategic plan to increase service levels, and improving the District's infrastructure so we can build upon it when / if additional revenue becomes available.

As a District, we are always seeking public comments and participation. I encourage and recommend that all ECCFPD's citizens and business owners become engaged with and learn about ECCFPD's current service level restrictions and organizational challenges. This can be accomplished by becoming familiar with ECCFPD's: website, Master Plan, social media channels and attending District meetings.

I look forward to a productive 2018 and continuing to push this District forward towards a higher level of service.

ABOUT THE EAST CONTRA COSTA FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT: The East Contra Costa Fire Protection District is a rural-funded fire district that protects approximately 249 square miles and over 114,000 residents. The District provides firefighting personnel and emergency medical services (basic life support) to the residents and businesses of the Cities of Brentwood and Oakley, the Township of Discovery Bay, and the communities of Bethel Island, Knightsen, Byron, Marsh Creek, and Morgan Territory.

As of July 1, 2017, ECCFPD has three (3) fire stations staffed by three (3) firefighters, for total district staffing of nine (9) firefighters per day. The district responds to over 6,900 calls a year that depend on approximately 9,000 fire engine responses. ECCFPD's Master Plan calls for nine (9) stations to adequately provide coverage to the District's citizens and businesses.

You can visit us on the District's website, www.eccfpd.org or through our social media pages on Facebook (East Contra Costa Fire Protection District), Instagram (@east_contra_costa_fire), Twitter (@ECCFPD), Nextdoor and our YouTube channel (East Contra Costa Fire Protection District) for more information on the Fire District.