

Pumper fire truck arrives at Smith River fire station

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The Smith River Fire Protection District has its first addition to its aging fleet of emergency vehicles since 2001.

On Jan. 21, a 2002 Pierce Pumper arrived at their fire station to replace the aging 1969 Kenworth.

Fire Chief Ron Simpson said the district purchased the 2,000-gallon tanker for \$129,000 from a station in Houston, Texas. He said a brand new tanker would have come with a ballpark price tag of \$600,000.

He added the volunteer firefighters were excited for their new addition to their fleet.

“They love the new truck. It has so many newer features than the older truck,” Simpson said. “We usually drill on Tuesday nights, when we’re supposed to have training, but they were too busy crawling on the truck and outfitting it with hoses and other equipment.”

Simpson said the problem with their aging fire trucks isn’t the mileage.

“For the amount of miles we put on trucks, it’s more about they ‘age out’ on us,” Simpson said. “Our 1969 Kenworth, when it finally went out of service, it only had 33,000 miles. So milage is not a big thing for us. It’s a parts issue.”

Simpson said the new truck was purchased from the fire district’s equipment reserves where they save up money to purchase new equipment every year. The Pierce Pumper will join the six other vehicles in their fleet and will serve as both a water tanker, to battle blazes in locations without access to water hydrants, and a type 1 engine for initial attacks, say on house fires.

Simpson said this additional truck would have played a major role in the 2017 fire on Fred Haight Drive that destroyed several buildings.

“It would have given us a second truck on the scene, rather than relying on aid from Crescent City Fire, Gasquet and Fort Dick,” Simpson said. “It was a pretty overwhelming fire, on one whole half of the street. We lost three buildings. It was a pretty big fire for a little town.”

The Smith River Fire District is looking to make other additions to its fleet, which has to cover 32 square miles. First, Simpson said they’re in the process of acquiring two new rescue rigs for next year. Second, they’re looking at moving operations from their aging station at 245 Haight Ave. to a new building — the empty Ray’s Food Place at the corner of Fred Haight Drive and U.S. Highway 101.

Simpson said they’re in the process of getting county permitting approved and plan to build the new station in six phases, starting with engine bays and an office for the secretary.

“As we build up money other five phases, it should take over a couple of years to get done,” Simpson said. “We had an engineer look at our old building and it’s not up to current earthquake standards.”

He added the parking lot of Ray’s Food Place is already cordoned off with concrete barriers to create space for emergency landings for Cal-Ore Life Flight when the Del Norte County Airport gets fogged in.

Finally, Simpson said the Smith River Fire District could always use additional bodies to its 15 volunteer firefighters.

“We struggle at times, what with their every-day jobs and volunteering. We’re always openly recruiting for new volunteers,” Simpson said. “We’ll provide all the training to get started. It’s just a matter of finding the right people to donate time to the community.”