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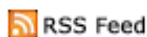
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Firefighter Paramedics Report for Duty Early

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By Patric Hedlund

The new firefighter-paramedic program fought for and won by citizens of Pine Mountain does not officially begin until March 1, but three paramedics have quietly begun to get into the routine by taking shifts at Station #58 in Pine Mountain.

Last week Kern County's Department of Emergency Medical Services formally presented the guidelines for Kern County Fire Department's first firefighter-paramedic program.



Ron Montecino and David Whitman shown here at their 7:30 a.m. shift change

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Program.

on Monday, Feb. 23. The paramedic patrol truck will be on hand by March 1. This is the first such program for the Kern County Fire Department.

The department's first paramedic patrol truck—displayed last month at Chief Dennis Thompson's announcement of his retirement—has recently been in San Diego at a professional conference, "showing off," according to Randy Coleman, a member of the Pine Mountain Club Property Owners Association board who has been a liaison with KCFD. The residents of Pine Mountain voted in last November's election to raise the funds needed to provide a 24-hour paramedic service for their community.

The following firefighters will be staffing station 58 as the medic:

Ron Montecino (C shift)— Ron has been with the Kern County Fire Department for two years, he has been a Paramedic for six years. He has previously worked for ground and air ambulance services and is a member of the fire department EMS teaching cadre. Ron was nominated Paramedic of the year in 2005.

Devin Lawrence (B shift)— Devin has been with the Kern County Fire Department for four years. He has been a Paramedic for 15 years. He previously worked for a ground ambulance service and is a member of the fire department EMS teaching cadre. Devin also instructs Paramedics at Bakersfield College.

David Whitman (A shift)— David has been with the Kern County Fire Department for over two years. He has been a Paramedic for five years. He previously worked for a ground ambulance service and is a member of the fire department EMS teaching cadre.

The implementation protocols presented by Kern County Department of Emergency Medical Services Director Ross Elliott last week say the paramedic program will be operated 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

"However," the document adds, *"the paramedic assigned to Station 58 is a single resource. Consequently, there will be periods of time when the paramedic may not be available. Examples of such instances include:*

- *Paramedic is responding to a call, and a second or third overlapping call occurs during the same time period;*
- *Station 58 crew is conducting mandatory multi-company fire-related drills/exercises, and may be out of the area;*
- *No ambulance paramedic is available in Frazier Park, and the next closest paramedic resource is Arvin, Taft or Bakersfield, and a high acuity medical emergency occurs in Frazier Park or Pinon Pines. The Station 58 paramedic may be deployed outside of the Pine Mountain Club community to the emergency; or*
- *The paramedic is assisting ambulance personnel in transporting a patient to the hospital (i.e., multiple patients, high acuity cases, limited ability to hand-off patient to BLS crew, etc.). Such a circumstance will be rare.*

Planned absences of the paramedic position will be back-filled with another paramedic."

In telephone and email interviews on February 20, *The Mountain Enterprise* asked Kern County Fire Chief & Director of Emergency Services Dennis Thompson to explain whether the protocol implies that if the ground ambulance service is not adequately staffed, the paramedic program in Pine Mountain would be called upon to provide Emergency Medical response to the greater Frazier Mountain Communities.

Thompson replied: "It is merely a reminder to the community and the Board that we cannot absolutely guarantee 100% coverage with the firefighter paramedic, 100% of the time.

"However, we are going to do everything within our power to ensure that any time out of Station 58's response area is minimized to the extent possible. This includes backup with our

Paramedic Captain who would be available from Bakersfield to fill in behind, or by call-back on overtime of another firefighter paramedic.”

He added that “part of the program also calls for documentation of everything that occurs, with a report back to the Board [of Supervisors] at the six-month mark. This would include number of calls, number of paramedic interventions, number of transfers to paramedic ambulance for transport, and number of transfers to a BLS ambulance that would require the firefighter paramedic to go with the patient to the hospital, etc.”

Thompson then referred to an event in the summer of 2008, when Pine Mountain Engine #58 was called to Lebec near the Interstate 5 for a grass fire, just as a house fire in Frazier Park and three medical emergency calls in diverse parts of the mountain occurred simultaneously, leaving no Kern County emergency medical response or ambulance available when a PMC lifeguard went into convulsions.

In an email February 20, Thompson wrote: “The incident on Interstate 5 also prompted us to re-evaluate our response protocols (especially in light of the firefighter paramedic level of service) to limit their response out of their area to the highest degree possible.

“The Fire Department will be managing the availability of the firefighter paramedic to come as close to 100% as possible....”

He added, “There will tentatively be a community meeting March 1 to explain the program to the public.”

Further information about such plans will be posted at www.MountainEnterprise.com as soon as more detail is available.

[This is part of the [February 27, 2009](http://www.MountainEnterprise.com) online edition of The Mountain Enterprise.]

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