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Transfer of Command at MOFD

By Nick Marnell



MOFD's Darrell Lee and his wife Nancy, with daughters Kelsey and Priscilla, after his retirement presentation June 18. Photo N. Marnell

medical services system, including the Medical Advisory Committee and the Emergency Medical Care Committee, which he chairs. "He has served the county with distinction, and has made many contributions to our EMS community. For that he deserves our deep appreciation and respect," said Pat Frost, EMS director of Contra Costa Health Services. "I admire him as an individual and will miss his leadership," added Dr. William Walker, CCHS director and health officer.

"Many lives have been saved because of the work of Chief Lee," said Supervisor Candace Andersen. And not only because of his fire and medical responses; Lee also served on the board of the East Bay Regional Communication System. "I was surprised by how much he knows about modern communications systems and hardware," said MOFD fire chief Stephen Healy. "His skills took years to acquire and will be irreplaceable in many ways."

In September 2001 the federal government knew plenty about Lee's communication skills. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, he was assigned as the communications officer of the Mission Support Team, and he provided logistical and communication support at Ground Zero. Lee later became a founding member of the Department of Homeland Security.

Directors and staff and the rank and file recognized Lee's helpful, easy going manner. "Darrell Lee has as much institutional knowledge and enthusiasm for the fire service as anyone the district has ever had working here," said Mark DeWeese, MOFD labor representative.

Fire district volunteers shared that sentiment as well. "This community has been very fortunate to have Darrell as a member of our fire district all these years," said Gordon Nathan, past MOFD director and president of the Rescue One Foundation. "Darrell has been the district's liaison to Rescue One Foundation and he has worked with the board to educate it on the latest in EMS equipment and technology."

"Lee has always been a big asset to the county," said retiring ConFire assistant chief Alan Hartford, acknowledging that Lee's reputation "dropped" all district boundaries. Caravantes described a near Hollywood ending to his professional relationship with Lee. "I got to serve with him on probably the last fire of his career," said the ConFire captain, who was called to help suppress the Tarry Lane structure fire in Orinda on June 23.

He arrived on the scene in 1984 in his Angels Flight pants and flip flops, according to Gil Caravantes, captain with the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District. And on June 27, division chief Darrell Lee punched out of Moraga-Orinda Fire District station 45 for the final time in his firefighting career. Some of the people whose lives Lee impacted over those 30 years shared their feelings about the retired division chief.

"He's been my friend since 1995," said John Wyro, MOFD board president. "Whenever you needed help, Darrell was there." Wyro reflected on the many programs Lee implemented that improved pre-hospital patient care, notably the 12-lead electrocardiogram procedure which he instituted in the district in 1997. "Lee is a model who will be held as an example as long as this district is around," said Wyro.

As he rose through the ranks of the fire service, Lee served in numerous capacities throughout the Contra Costa County emergency

"Darrell is a pretty amazing guy," said Andersen. "He will be missed."

Lee was scheduled to transfer the command of his shift to new battalion chief Felipe Barreto at a ceremony outside station 45 in Orinda July 1. "The next generation is coming, the old generation is leaving, but the old guard isn't dead yet," said Lee. "I'll still stand in the background and support the district."

ConFire Assistant Chief Departs

Late in the evening of June 27, assistant chief of operations Alan Hartford stunned colleagues at the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District by announcing his retirement effective July 1. Hartford was promoted in October to replace John Ross, who retired in April, 2013.

Hartford ends a 34-year career in public service, where he started as an emergency medical technician for a private ambulance company in central Contra Costa County. He joined the Riverview Fire District in 1986 as a firefighter. The Riverview Fire District dissolved in 1994 and became a part of ConFire, where Hartford rose to battalion chief in 2004 until his latest promotion in October.

"It has been a tremendous career," said Hartford in an internal email. "I am honored and humbled having worked for this organization and all of you; particularly this recent period as your operations chief."

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