

SUN CITY

INDEPENDENT

No. 10

Wednesday, March 2, 2016

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SCHOA on the grow



Submitted photo/Carole Studdard

After months of delays, the Sun City Home Owners Association began its building expansion last week. Shortly after the first work began, the board gathered for an official ground-breaking. SCHOA shovelers included, from left, Sharon Major, Don Thompson, Ritchie Miller, Steven Puck, Pamela Schwartz, Lloyd Maple and David Rohde. By the time shovels were put to earth Feb. 24, trenches were already being prepared for footings. SCHOA officials expect the new meeting room being available June 1 at the latest.

Ambulance service on the way

Sun City Fire officials shopping for vehicle

By Rusty Bradshaw
Independent Newspapers

There is now one final hurdle for Sun City to get its own ambulance service.

Sun City Fire and Medical Department Chief Mike Thompson said fire district officials received a signed agreement with American Medical Response Feb. 24. That agreement was

the final obstacle before the Sun City certificate of necessity request went to the Arizona Department of Health Services for final approval. DHS Director Dr. Cara Christ has 30 days from receipt of the agreement to review and pass judgment on Sun City's request, according to Mr. Thompson.

"If things go the way they have been going with fire departments and districts (that also requested and received CONs), she might make a decision within two to three weeks," he explained.

But it could be six to seven months before

Sun City will see its first ambulance on the streets of the community.

"We are still setting up the billing system and getting other things in place," Mr. Thompson said.

The Sun City Fire District Board of Directors was prepared to talk about an agreement with AMR in its Feb. 9 special meeting. But the item was skipped over because of a concern from the agencies' attorneys. The item did not return to the board's Feb. 16 regular meeting agenda.

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Con

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"The agreement went to AMR but our medical director pointed out an error in the West Valley Protocol section of the agreement," explained Mike Thompson, Sun City fire chief, during the Sun City Home Owners Association board Feb. 23. "Since AMR's people are not familiar with the Valley protocols, they want to look it over some more."

AMR is a Valleywide medical transport company that received a CON last year. The company later merged with Rural Metro, the ambulance provider for Sun City. Rural Metro had filed bankruptcy in 2014.

Sun City fire department officials and district board members are also preparing a possible request for voters to fund a bond to construct a new fire station and replace or refurbish aging equipment. The bond would not exceed \$10 million and would be paid off in 20 years, according to Ron Deadman, Sun City assistant fire chief.

"It would be about \$21 per household per year to pay it off," he said.

Sun City district officials have been trying to get a head start on the ambulance service by researching ambulances. Mr. Thompson said he and Mr. Deadman are looking at used vehicles to start. These could be purchased for up to \$30,000, compared to costs ranging from \$70,000-\$150,000, depending on the level of service available in specific vehicles, according to Mr. Thompson.

"We are also looking at a lease/purchase option," he added.

SCFMD officials set aside about \$250,000 in its capital improvement fund and some investment funds to purchase the ambulances and provide salaries for six paramedics to staff the first vehicle.

Sun City will begin with one ambulance, and once it is in service AMR will take one vehicle out of Sun City service. As Sun City adds ambulances — up to a total of three — AMR will remove its vehicles from Sun City service, Mr. Thompson explained.

In the meantime, AMR will continue to provide Sun City ambulance service. Mr. Thompson said eventually Sun City will handle all advanced life support calls while AMR will take care of basic support and transport runs.

"This truly is a partnership, and we have a good working plan," he added.

Mr. Thompson also said he knows another private ambulance company is preparing to file for a countywide CON.

If Dr. Christ gives approval to Sun City's CON request, it will be preliminary until SCFMD has at least one ambulance in service, then will become a full certificate.

Sun City Fire officials are not seeking the CON to increase its revenues.

"We are doing this for continuity of care for the patient," Mr. Thompson said.

The chief explained Sun City Fire and Medical will base its charges on a break even basis.

"An ambulance program through the district has to be self-sustaining, we can't use taxpayer dollars for its operation because right now we are at our tax rate cap," he explained. "Any profit above costs, if there are any, must be used to lower the tax rate."

Regarding district officials' plan to request bond funds from taxpayers is needed to help replace a structure that is inadequate and refurbish or replace aging equipment. Mr. Thompson, who lives in the Daisy Mountain Fire District area north of Phoenix, said voters in that district approved a bond for \$16 million.

"They went for and got the whole amount the could," he said. "We will not do that. We want to stay true to the values here."

Sun City resident Jim Stark, a member of the fire district's bond committee, said he had mixed emotions about a bond.

"Fire officials have done a good job of figuring this thing out," he said. "But even with a bond, we are back to the same old issue of some large entities in Sun City that use the fire and medical services but are tax exempt."

Mr. Thompson said the biggest of those entities are Recreation Centers of Sun City, Boswell Medical Center and Banner Health. Some retirement and assisted living communities are also tax exempt, but not as many as fire officials first believed, according to Mr. Thompson.

"The fire district loses a lot of revenue from those tax exempt entities that could really help with the financial issues the district faces," Mr. Stark said.

Sun City's fire district is not alone in facing financial woes. Mr. Thompson said Daisy Mountain Fire District sought a bond from its voters because of the same issues Sun City is facing.

"I hear different groups talking about another recession coming," he said. "We could not survive that. If we lose another 20 percent of our value, we will go away."

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Fire district officials working to rebuild

By **Rusty Bradshaw**
Independent Newspapers

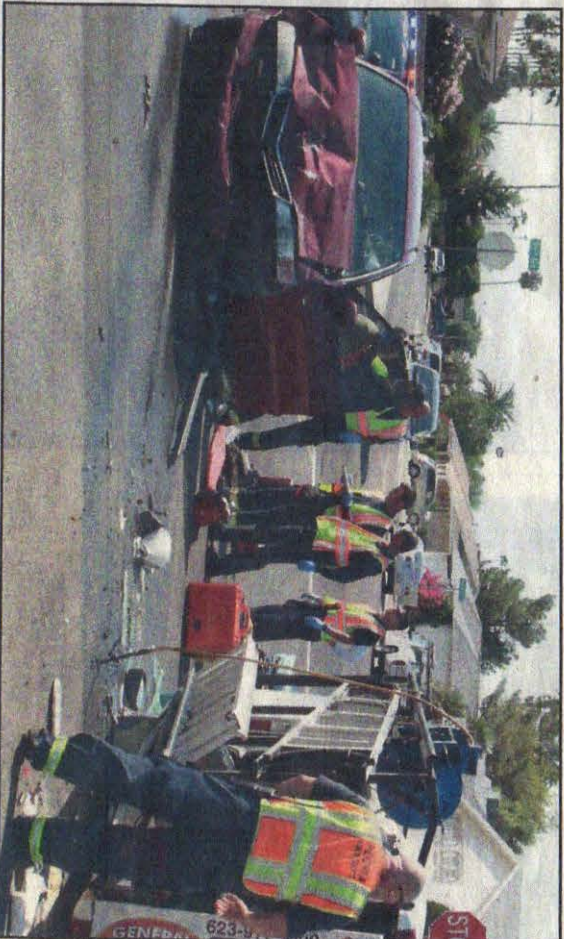
After more than five years of trimming budgets and cutting back, Sun City Fire District officials are busy rebuilding the community's fire department.

No. 1 on the list is personnel. The department has 15 new firefighters either in training or getting ready to begin and there will be new faces in station leadership positions in the next two years.

"We are rebuilding this department to what it needs to be to serve this community properly," said Michael Thompson, Sun City fire chief.

Two of the 15 new firefighters, all funded by a two-year SAFER grant, are currently training at the Arizona Fire Academy and the other 13 will begin training in January, according to Ron Deadman, Sun City assistant fire chief. Once they are all trained and on duty, they will be assigned to stations in a

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Sun City Fire and Medical Department crews tend to victims at an accident at 99th Avenue and Cameo Drive. Department officials are working to rebuild the agency after more than five years of budget trimming.

Independent Newspapers/Rusty Bradshaw

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Rebuild

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way to avoid an experience issue, according to Mr. Thompson.

"We will have one person per truck per shift as a brand new firefighter," he explained. "That way we'll have experience on all the shifts."

The existing crews are preparing for the new dynamic.

"Our crews are ready for it, and they have their training hats on," Mr. Thompson said.

The department will also have three captains and at least one engineer retiring by the end of the fiscal year in June, and more will retire during the 2016-17 fiscal year.

"We will be making some promotions shortly," Mr. Thompson said.

Fire district officials are also working to rebuild the department financially. Mr. Thompson said officials are retooling the district's budget process.

"We are going to do it in such a way that we will have a better idea what we are spending, what it is costing us and how we can do it better," Mr. Thompson said.

District officials experienced some issues with the current budget, including two large maintenance bills that just came in from one year ago.

"Under a new system, if we don't get an invoice within a month, we will be calling

the vendor," Mr. Thompson explained.

The district's 2015-16 budget is at 42 percent expenditure at this point, which is slightly higher than at the same time last year, according to Mr. Thompson. Part of the reason is maintenance issues have eaten up 104 percent of that line item already, forcing district officials last month to amend the budget to provide funds for the rest of the year.

Mr. Thompson also said district officials are negotiating with Daisy Mountain Fire District on shared services to help each department save money. Part of these shared services could include maintenance.

To address some capital and equipment needs that cannot be met with the existing revenue stream, fire district officials continue researching putting a bond before the voters next year. The next bond team meeting is 2 p.m. Monday, Jan. 4.

District officials would use bond monies, if approved by the voters, to build a new fire station in Youngtown to replace an existing inadequate structure, and replace two fire trucks that are well past their designed life.

VT Fire Department Independent December 16, 2015

Fire districts in crisis

Leaders call for legislative action to return control

By Rusty Bradshaw
Independent Newspapers

Sun City Fire Department officials began meeting with Arizona legislators to discuss funding options for fire districts. Strapped for cash because of tax-rate

caps, fire department management is backing a push by the Arizona Fire Districts Association to restructure fire district funding in the state. At the heart of the effort is a desire to give local control to the individual fire district boards of directors.

"You have been elected to direct this district, but your hands are tied," Mike Thompson, Sun City fire chief, told the Sun City board during its Nov. 10 workshop meeting. "These artificial caps mean fund-

ing keeps going down but standards of care keep going up."

The Sun City Fire District board has cut its budget for six straight years to match the reduction in funds, which come almost entirely from property taxes. State legislators have not only put a cap on the tax rate but limited district revenue growth annually.

Tax rates for fire districts are capped at

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\$3.25 for each \$100 of assessed value. There are 156 fire districts in Arizona, with 41, or 26 percent, at the rate cap. Maricopa County is home to 20 fire districts and eight of them, or 40 percent, are at the cap.

Districts at the cap are mostly more rural, with Sun City being the exception.

"Sun City was hard hit by the housing bust," Mr. Thompson said. "Even though we're at the rate cap, as property values went down, so did our revenue."

An Elliot D. Pollack & Co. report commissioned by the Arizona Fire Districts Association, an advocacy group for fire districts, to assess property tax limitations on fire districts states property values are expected to continue to lag behind what is considered normal for two or three more years. That does not bode well for the Sun City Fire Department.

"We have cut as much as we can and still provide quality service," Mr. Thompson said.

In fact, the Sun City department has two fire vehicles past their replacement date and officials had to amend the 2015-16 budget to account for increased maintenance costs for the aging vehicles. To address those needs, and a need for a more efficient up-to-code fire station in the southwest sector of the community, fire officials are considering asking voters to approve a bond.

Fire officials also believe releasing the tax rate cap would allow them to adjust for increasing costs. While revenue is capped, the demand for service continues to increase along with the cost. Sun City fire units are dispatched to more than 1,000 calls per month, the vast majority for medical issues rather than fire.

Increasing the tax rate would not necessarily mean a higher tax bill for residents, according to the Pollack report.

"An increase in property tax rates does not necessarily cause a homeowner's tax bill to increase because the rate is applied to the assessed value of the property," the report stated.

The statement is supported by charts tracking tax rate increases versus taxes paid by homeowners in various state districts. For example, the Bullhead City Fire District raised its tax rate from \$1.75 to \$2.96 between 2009 and 2014, but the estimated annual tax bill actually decreased from \$254 in 2009 to \$241 in 2014. That included a peak low of estimated taxes paid of \$224 in 2012. The increase since 2012 came as property values slowly increased.

Arizona Fire Districts Association officials are making a push to state legislators to reform fire district funding. The association, founded in 1982, released a television commercial explaining the need for change. Accessible on the Save Our Fire Districts website, [www. http://saveourfiredistrictsaz.com/the-facts/](http://saveourfiredistrictsaz.com/the-facts/), the video calls for legislative action to restore local control to fire districts and residents.

What do you think?

Do you have an opinion on this issue? Share your comments.

• Email: rbradshaw@newszap.com

"By removing the cap on fire district tax rates, the Legislature would give districts the ability to craft appropriate budgets for their size and service needs," the commercial states. "By keeping in place other controls, any increase for property owners would be held to pennies a day."

Arizona's 156 fire districts serve more than 1.5 million residents, according to AFDA officials. They employ more than 4,000 firefighters and paramedics who cover more than 27,000 square miles. Fire district first responders handled more than 46,000 fire 911 calls and 107,000 emergency medical calls in 2013.

Sun City Fire's bond plans moved forward in July when a committee was formed to research the option. Brian Lundberg, of Stifel Nicolas Co., said in a July 21 meeting the district could, based on assessed valuations in the community, bond up to \$16.9 million. It could be higher if secondary tax rates are used in calculations.

"That would amount to 31 cents per \$100 of assessed value," Mr. Lundberg said.

The fire district board later entered into an agreement with Stifel to provide consult-

ing services, at no charge to the district, as it researches the options for a bond.

While the district had the capacity to bond up to \$16.3 million, Mr. Thompson said the agency would, if a bond is the direction the board takes, bond only enough to build a fire station and buy two trucks.

Gabe Baldrà, Sun City Fire District finance director, said the agency does not have the cash capacity to take care of all of its needs.

"This is why a bond needs to be considered," he said.

If the board decides to pursue a bond, it would be on the November 2016 ballot.

VF SC Fire Department Independent November 18, 2015

Firefighters tout benefits of thermal-imaging cameras

Use during recent fires saved thousands of dollars in property

ERIN REEP
DAILY NEWS-SUN

It's a small, hand-held device that appears to "see" in the dark, using thermal infrared imaging to detect heat in objects and locate them in the darkness and smoke.

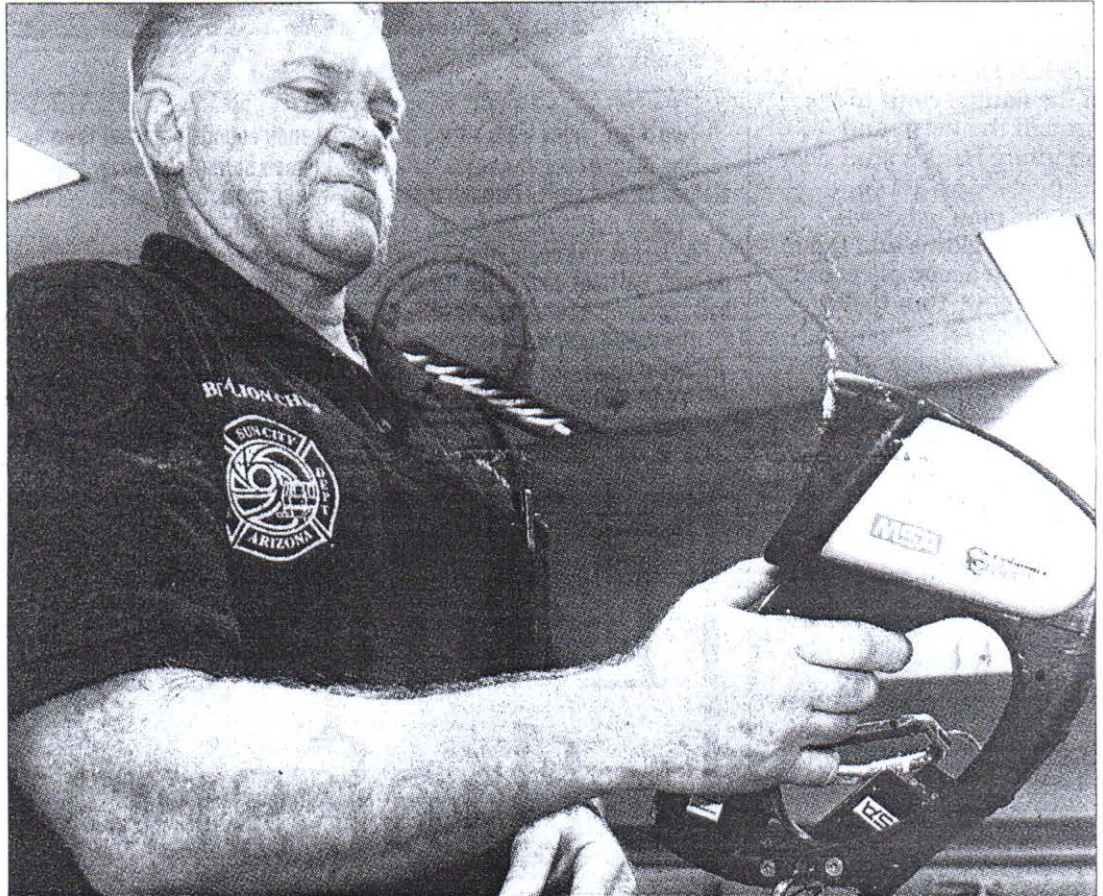
Prepayment drops cost of new engine. See Page A3.

Sun City firefighters are praising this small piece of technology that they say has recently saved property owners literally thousands of dollars in damage costs for cleanup.

Battalion Chief Ron Gilbert brought its use to the attention of the Sun City Fire District board at its meeting, and described how the thermal imaging cameras aided firefighters on two weekend fires in November.

The device resembles a mini-television, attached to a piece of hard plastic that can be gripped by the firefighter. It uses thermal imaging to detect heat energy emitted by people, animals and objects, and translates the infrared images into visual representations on a small screen.

"In a dark environment, it



MOLLIE J. HOPPE/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City Fire Chief Ron Gilbert looks through a thermal-imaging camera used to detect objects through smoke and darkness.

allows you to pick up objects, people and things," Gilbert said.

Sun City Fire Capt. Jeff Snyder credits a

thermal-imaging camera with providing help to his company during a condominium fire at 1 a.m. Sunday off 98th Avenue, just south of

Thunderbird Road in Sun City.

While fire burned through a condo unit, the adjoining unit was untouched by fire.

OVER

and firefighters used the device to "see" through the walls without having to make a large hole in the walls and damage the unit.

"There's no doubt in my mind that since we had this equipment in the adjoining unit, we were able to prevent damage to the unit," said Snyder, who is captain of the A-shift of Engine 131.

Snyder's company was assigned to the unit next door to the fire. Firefighters entered the condo and awakened the sleeping occupants, then cut a small hole in the wall to check for smoke or fire inside the walls, he said.

As firefighters used the imaging camera to view the fire, they had no need to cut a larger hole in the wall, he said.

Battalion Chief Ron Gilbert said a thermal-imaging camera also aided firefighters at a warehouse fire at Brunk's Auction Ron Inc. on Nov. 8. The camera helped firefighters see where objects were lying in the midst of the smoke, and thus the department was able to save a good portion of the structure, he said.

"All the stuff that was stored in the warehouse — our crews were able to see to get through the building," Gilbert said. "They were able to see through the smoke where the aisle-ways were, and to determine that there was no fire. It was all smoke," he said, adding the crews were alerted to that as they viewed the thermal layers shown on the camera.

The thermal-imaging cameras cost about

\$15,000-\$20,000 each, Gilbert said. Some East Valley communities' fire departments have successfully secured grants for the devices.

"We've applied for it, but haven't been successful," Gilbert said.

Sun City Fire District owns three. One model, purchased in 2001, is on Engine 133, and two newer models are on

Engines 132 and 131, respectively.

Gilbert said the Sun City Fire District needs four more of the devices to fully outfit its fleet.

Firefighters have asked the board to consider buying one per year.

"From the firefighting side, this is a priority for us," Gilbert said.

Erin Reep can be reached at 876-2532 or at ereep@aztrib.com



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City Fire Chief Ron Gilbert focuses a thermal-imaging camera on a truck at Fire Station 132 at 99th and Alabama avenues.

Sun City Fire primed for new pumper

ERIN REEP
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The Sun City Fire District board is moving ahead with plans to replace an aging fire engine.

In its regular monthly meeting Tuesday at Fire Station 131, the board unanimously adopted a motion to ask Pierce Manufacturing Inc. for a bid on the purchase of a new pumper. Three board members, the fire chief and a fire captain will travel to Pierce headquarters in Appleton, Wis., next week to examine new and older models of fire engines to determine what would best suit the fire district's needs.

Some fire-engine models are so new, information about them is not yet available in brochures or on videocassette, said Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

Sebert and board members Jim Schmidt, Gerry Gonyer and Ed George will travel to Appleton. Sun City Fire Capt. Ron Gilbert will already be in Wisconsin to play in a golf tournament and will meet the other fire officials at the manufacturer's headquarters, Sebert said.

"We really want to go up there with tape measures and go through the trucks," Sebert said.

The trip allows fire officials a chance to evaluate the trucks and determine if there is sufficient space to install apparatus including radio equipment in the cab of the truck. This is a more efficient method of doing so, as opposed to making multiple purchase-order changes

once a truck has been ordered, he said.

The district maintains four pumpers in its fleet. It tries to keep engines for a maximum of 15 years, with 10 years in primary service and four to five years as a backup. New engine purchases are spaced out every few years, Sebert said.

"It's time to cycle our oldest truck out of the fleet" while the engine still has a reasonable resale value, he said.

Pierce is one of three manufacturers that has local repair facilities, Sebert said.

"Pierce has been our product line — with one exception — for the past 15 years or so," he said.

Board members will take the proposal with them to submit at the time of their visit to the company. Most apparatus manufacturers are currently offering their yearend discount of about 5 percent before implementing next year's prices, Sebert said. Pierce's prices will go up Nov. 1; however, the company will extend the current rates to the Sun City Fire District until Nov. 14, he said.

The approximate cost of a new engine — to duplicate the last truck the district bought — is \$410,000, Sebert said.

In other Sun City Fire District board news:

● The board unanimously approved a motion to create a wildland firefighting team proposal for the district. By approving the motion, the district will enter an

intergovernmental agreement with the state land department, allowing crews and engines from the department to be called out on fires on public lands — such as some north of Sun City near Lake Pleasant.

"We can receive reimbursement for fighting those fires," Sebert said.

The federal government reimburses fire districts for helping fight such fires. This could create an extra revenue stream for Sun City Fire.

"It's quite lucrative, really," Sebert said, adding that it's a bonus for departments like Sun City that suffer during slower summer months.

The government reimburses departments up to \$115 per hour for a fire engine that goes out on such a call, Sebert said. Additionally, fire departments are reimbursed for their manpower costs and resource costs in sending crews, Sebert said.

By entering the agreement, the department is not required to send crews if it is called; it is the department's choice, he said.

● The board unanimously adopted a motion to move forward with plans to renovate Station 131. The plans are currently in the investigation/evaluation phase, board members said. The total cost of remodeling the station would be \$20,400, which would come from the capital-projects fund. The architectural firm being considered is Pearlman Architects of Scottsdale.

● The fire district budget "looks

good," reported Treasurer Tom Stroozas. The district brought in \$1.235 million in revenue for the month of September, with \$503,622 in expenditures. The district's excess revenue for the month is \$732,023, Stroozas reported.

The district has a deficit for the year to date to the tune of \$12,129, he said. This is common for the three-month summer period, he said.

In the October through December fiscal quarter, tax revenue will pour in and the budget will balance, Stroozas said.

● Sebert announced the district's credit-line increase has been approved by the National Bank of Arizona, and final documents are being completed. The credit-line increase has been requested with the idea to fund apparatus and station projects over the next five years.

The board had applied for a \$2.5 million line of credit for future expenditures, Sebert said previously. He stressed that the district is not purchasing anything with the money at this time, but is just increasing its line of credit.

● The Sun City Fire Department responded to 657 calls in September — four fires, 507 rescue-and-emergency medical-service calls, one hazardous-conditions call with no fire, 95 service calls, 25 good-intent calls, 24 false alarms or false calls and one special incident.

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DAILY NEWS-SUN

FRIDAY, OCT. 17, 2003

SCW Fire District boundaries swell

Growth spurs budget concerns

KATY O'GRADY
DAILY NEWS-SUN

A month after adding 119 acres to its boundaries, the Sun City West Fire District on Thursday nabbed another 179 acres and is eyeing more.

Board directors annexed the Coldwater Ranch development planned at the southeast corner of Jomax Road and the 123rd Avenue/El Mirage Road alignment by a 4-0 vote, with Sol Robinson absent, in their continuing effort to expand the district's tax base.

Developers of another four projects also have approached the district requesting annexation, which could bring another 358 acres and 1,289 homes.

Although happy to expand the district's tax base, directors were concerned about how the annexations might affect service requirements and the district's budget.

"As I said before, I have some real concerns over continually annexing these developments," said Director Bill Hamel.

Hamel said he didn't want Sun City West to build fire stations in the new developments if that would cost more than the impact fees brought in by the new homes.

Fire Marshal Jim Heger said each new home contributes a \$350 impact fee to the district to pay its way until it

Developments contiguous to Sun City West Fire District

Already annexed:

- Coldwater Ranch: 179 acres, 600 homes.
- Corte Bella: 700 acres, 1,850 homes.
- Dos Rios: 119 acres, 447 homes.

Considered for annexation:

- Sundero: 19 acres, 69 homes.
- Rancho Silverado: 60 acres, 240 homes.
- Rio Sierra: 80 acres, 280 homes.
- Cross River: 199 acres, 700 homes.

Total: 1,356 acres, 4,186 homes

hits the tax rolls.

Director Diane Holloway Cheney said she was also concerned about the new developments paying their own way, but said the district would not build any new stations unless they were reimbursed.

"Before we build anything anywhere, there has to be the funds," added Chairman Charles Frankel, saying new stations would probably be five years down the road if they're built at all.

"By then, many of us might be off the board," he said. Annexing the land now would give future directors a larger tax base before surrounding communities get a chance to annex them.

Chief Rob Biscoe said he spoke recently with the Peoria Fire Department and was

told it has a temporary station across from Coldwater and is planning a permanent one within three-quarters of a mile of the development.

"If that station is there and knowing the system we have today, I don't think we'll ever have to build a station there," he said.

Most Valley fire departments participate in an automatic-aid system where the closest unit is dispatched, regardless of boundaries. There are some areas in Sun City West, Biscoe said, where Peoria is always the first responder because of its proximity. Holloway Cheney said her home falls into that category.

ERIN REEP
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City Fire Station 132 clears space

When Jennifer Brooks became a firefighter six years ago, she became part of the family at Sun City Fire Station 132.

Brooks was one of just two women on the department at that time, among three crews of four firefighters each, and had to learn to live in tight quarters on the job.

Working three 24-hour shifts per week meant sharing a bunk with three male firefighters, and learning how to negotiate bathroom time.

Now pointing down a long hallway that once housed eight beds and a bathroom, Brooks is grateful; grateful for a remodeling project that created eight separate bunks and two new shower/locker rooms.

"It's definitely more convenient," said the 30-year-old Brooks, who is also the mother of two small children. "We pretty much have our own bathroom. The privacy is a nice convenience," she said.

Completed in mid-May of this year, the remodeling project added 6,008 square feet to the fire station — bringing it from 4,367 square feet to 10,375 square feet. It added living space for the firefighters, in addition to storage space and a third apparatus bay to house extra fire trucks.

The idea for remodeling Fire Station 132 was born two and a half years ago, as various issues arose that the Fire Board had to make decisions on, said Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

Due to a poorly designed roof, water began leaking in when it rained. Additionally, the staff encountered plumbing problems in the walls, Sebert said. There were problems with mold throughout the building, said Capt. Mike Gobster, who worked for the department in the 1970s, leaving for a time and returning for the past 13 years.

Fixing the problems would cost \$50,000 or more, Sebert said. As the Sun City Fire Board considered sinking money into remodeling, board directors began looking at long range plans, privacy issues and growth needs, and decided to remodel beginning last year. There were other issues that made the remodel the right decision at this

time, he said.

One big problem at the station was privacy. There were three full-time female firefighters on staff who had to adapt to fire stations designed and built primarily for men, Sebert said. Station 132 was built in 1975.

"One of the big issues is that ... up, until the latter part of the 80s, fire stations were built for the male-dominated fire service," Sebert said.

Station 132 was originally designed with living space for four firefighters, Sebert said. The men and women slept in an open area with eight beds, the communal "bunkhouse," Brooks explained. There was

a combined family room with a television, study area and kitchen all in one — offering little privacy.

Now, Brooks shows off tidy medical and cleaning supplies storage closets, with supplies marked in neatly-labeled plastic bins. Down a long hallway are eight private bunks with a bed, desk and locker in each room. The rooms provide quiet places to study or sleep, and have adjustable volumes so firefighters can tune the loudness of the fire alarm to their lightness or heaviness of sleep, as the case may be. Lights go on automatically when there is a fire alarm.

As firefighters serve on four- or -five person crews, some firefighters sleep while others need to be roused to go out on calls, Brooks said. In a communal setting, it was more difficult for those not going on a call to continue to get rest as the loud alarm sounded and the lights went on.

Brooks said the privacy is appreciated, as it wasn't until she came along that the department added a curtain to separate its male and female firefighters as

they slept. Women firefighters had to lock the bathroom/shower door and make sure male staff were aware that they were showering to keep the male staff out for 20 or 30 minutes, Brooks recalled.

Brooks is no stranger to "adapting" to being one of few women in a male-dominated field, she said. When asked if she is questioned about her abilities while out on calls, she said, "all the time."

"I've been asked if I was a secretary, because I was doing the documentation (on a call)," she said with a smile. Brooks has also been asked if she was a nurse, or if she shouldn't pass off helping someone up from a fall injury to a male colleague.

In the latter instance, Brooks was determined to pick the person up to show she was as capable as her male counterparts, she said.

The other two women on staff "get it too," she said.

The remodeling added a study, a separate room to watch TV, and a large kitchen. Sebert pointed out that previous fire stations were built using residential

fixtures in kitchens and bathrooms, which wore out more quickly due to the heavy usage in fire stations. With the remodel, industrial fixtures were installed in Station 132.

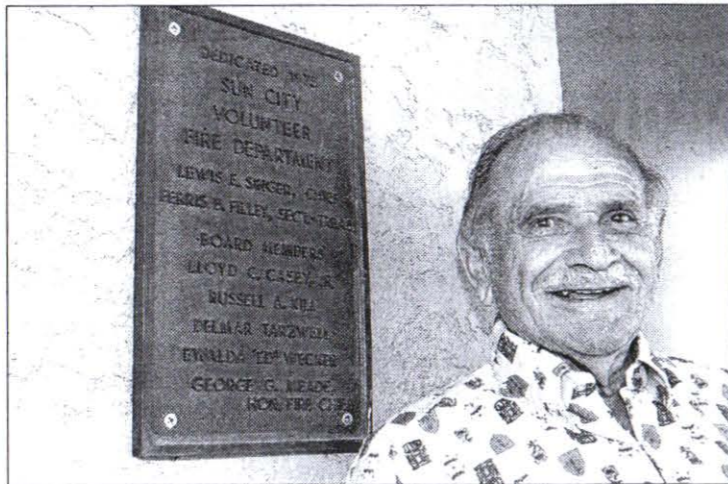
The station was the second in Sun City, following Station 131 at 99th Avenue and Bell Road built in 1973. A third existing station on 111th Avenue, previously owned by a private fire protection company, was acquired by Sun City Fire in 1991.

In 1975, the Fire Department envisioned it would handle 300 fire calls per year, with one or two calls per week, Sebert said. That was to be handled through two fire stations and with two fire trucks — one at each station.

Currently Sun City Fire handles approximately 11,000 calls per year. In 2002 alone, of 10,726 calls, Station 132 handled 2,695 of them.

"Nobody ever envisioned the call volume, and some of the services the fire department got into," Sebert said.

In addition to responding to fire calls, firefighters handle snake removal, offer paramedic service and perform community outreach services.



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Lew Singer was the first Sun City fire chief. The remodeled station is dedicated to him and other members of the Sun City Volunteer Fire Department.

That, coupled with the growth of the Northwest Valley, put a higher demand on the Fire Department, taking its toll on the department's infrastructure, Sebert said.

The remodeling project's total cost was \$855,000, including associated construction costs, furnishings such as new office furniture and window coverings, Sebert said. The project was spearheaded by board members Edwin George and Jim Schmidt, who comprise the Grounds and Equipment Committee.

Should there be continued growth, the contractor and the architect added into the building the potential to add four more bunkers.

"I think our growth in Sun City has basically stopped now," Sebert said. "We're completely surrounded by Peoria, Surprise, El Mirage and Youngtown."

"Overall, I think the large growth periods for the Sun City Fire District are over," he said.

The Sun City Fire Department is having an open house at Station 132 from 9 a.m. to noon, Oct. 7. For information, call 974-2321.

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MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City Fire Capt. Mike Gobster says there was less to clean in the old fire station. The remodeled Station 132 is 10,375 square feet, with a larger TV room and kitchen.

Fire board authorizes vehicle purchase

ERIN REEP
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The Sun City Fire Board unanimously approved the purchase of two vehicles as replacements for its 1990 Chevrolet Cavaliers in a special meeting Tuesday afternoon.

The meeting at Station 131 was called at an earlier date than previously scheduled because three board members were going on vacation.

Board member Ed George led discussion on and made the motion to approve auctioning off the fire district's two 1990 vehicles, replacing them with a minivan and another car.

The two vehicles to be purchased are a 2003 Chevrolet Express Cargo Van for \$18,549 and 2003 Chevrolet

Malibu at \$16,832. The funds will come from the Capital Projects Vehicular Replacement Fund.

"We program our staff vehicles to be on the fleet for 12 years," said Fire Chief Jim Sebert. "What really has happened is, those vehicles were 13 years old." Upkeep on the two cars has become costly, and the board decided it was time for new vehicles, Sebert said.

The Malibu will be used for fire prevention specialist Stacy Bodenstedt, with the van used for fire operations — that is, taking staff to training events, and transporting equipment and gear.

The Cavaliers will be sold at a later date.

In other board news:

● The board unanimously approved a motion to

authorize an increase in the district's line of credit with the National Bank of Arizona. The board decided to apply for a \$2.5 million line of credit to be available for future expenditures, such as fire engines and building projects, Sebert said.

● Board member James Schmidt and Sebert reported on minor problems encountered following the remodeling of Station 132. Some may be covered by warranty, Sebert said, including cracks in exterior concrete pads, grout lines in interior floor tile and problems with a shower. Other problems include a possible water leak around a hot water heater, lack of a floor drain slope in four bathrooms, the need for spacer blocks between kitchen and dayroom

cabinets, roof leaks and performance of a generator.

The board unanimously agreed to pay the remaining \$80,000 owed on the project, with the condition that the contractors, Reliance Build, Inc., resolve the problems at the station. Sebert said the problems were normal problems typically encountered following a renovation project, with the exception of the generator problem. Engineers are reviewing that problem, he said.

"With a remodeling project, there are always little things that need to be resolved," he said. "Our concern is that we have the building handed over to us in the condition in which we ordered it," Sebert said.

● Sebert submitted a report of the District's Capital

Funds for review. As of July 30, the capital projects had a net worth of \$575,923, with \$224,580 in a Money Market savings fund account and \$351,343 in a securities account with Prudential Financial. Additionally, the district had budgeted \$650,000 in capital funds, creating a total of approximately \$1.225 million available capital funds.

The securities account is a treasury account, containing funds in U.S. Treasury notes, Sebert explained. The board thus views those funds as "off limits," saving the funds until they reach maturity, rather than cashing them in and paying more in interest in the long run.

Sebert also gave a list of known capital project financial obligations, including

\$191,629 due to GE Capital Public Finance for ladder truck 131, a \$205,000 annual payment to the National Bank of Arizona for the Phoenix Regional Wireless Network for communications infrastructure, and \$80,000 due to Reliance Build Inc. for remodeling/renovation of Station 132.

Subtracting those obligations and the purchase of the two new vehicles, and factoring in money in the securities account, there will be \$362,558 in available revenue for the 2003-2004 fiscal year, Sebert said.

● A report on status of the board's finances from the county treasurer had not yet arrived, and will be given next month, said board Treasurer Tom Stroozas.

Erin Reep can be reached at 876-2532 or at ereep@aztrib.com

Ready for restoration

Carwash to raise money to fix up old SC firetruck

By Brent Whiting
The Arizona Republic

The old firetruck is white now instead of the red it was decades ago when it roared down the streets of Sun City.

The vehicle is back after a long absence, bringing memories for veteran firefighters in the retirement community.

Nearly a dozen of them used to work from the 1973 pumper before it was sold to Bullhead City in 1982 and

eventually found its way to Mexico.

"It's a reminder of where we have come from," said Fire Chief Jim Sebert, who joined the Sun City Department in 1975.

Battalion Chief Ron Gilbert, a 29-year veteran, said the once state-of-the-art truck shows the department has supplied its firefighters with good equipment over the years.

See **TRUCK** Page 4



Brent Whiting/The Arizona Republic

Ron Gilbert, a battalion chief for the Sun City Fire Department, shows off a 1973 pumper truck that will be restored for use in community events.

From Page 1

"It will be nice to get it running again," Gilbert said.

The American La France diesel now sits on a lot at the department's main station, 17017 N. 99th Ave., awaiting volunteer donations and labor to get it back in running shape.

The goal is to restore the truck and use it for parades, public displays and other special events in Sun City.

The Sun City Firefighters Women's Auxiliary, a support group, has sponsored a carwash Saturday to raise money for the restoration project.

The event is set for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the main station just north of Bell Road.

The pumper is one of two identical trucks purchased for Sun City in 1973. They were used until 1982, when both were sold to the Bullhead City Fire District.

Three years ago, Tim Van Scoter, a battalion chief for the Sun City department, decided to track down the old trucks.

Van Scoter found they had been sold to Cuerpo Rural de Bomberos, a fire department near Yuma in San Luis, Sonora.

In November 2002, Van Scoter and Ken Swick, another battalion chief, made a trip to San Luis. They found one of the trucks still in use but learned the other was out of service.

Ownership and transfer documents were obtained after Francisco Tabanico, the San Luis fire chief, offered to donate the idle truck to Sun City.

Two months ago, the vehicle was brought back to Sun City on a flatbed truck.

Firefighters haven't determined how much work will be needed to get the diesel engine running again.

The restoration will be done with donated time and funds, and it's hoped someone will donate parts.

Reach the reporter at brent.whiting@arizonarepublic.com or (602) 444-6937.

Car wash benefits Sun City Fire Dept.

The Sun City firefighters' Women's Auxiliary will hold a benefit car wash from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. June 28 at Sun City Fire Station 1, 17017 N. 99th Ave.

Fire department members and volunteers wash cars for a donation.

All donations will go to the Sun City Fire Department Fire Truck Restoration Fund. The fund is being used to refurbish Sun City's original fire truck, a 1973 American La France pumper, which was recently returned to the community.

The money will be used for mechanical repairs and refurbishment of the truck back to its original condition, to use it for public displays and special events.

Persons donating \$100 or more will become a member of the SCFD Engine 1 Crew and have their name listed on a special plaque to be displayed on the restored truck.

Call 974-2321.



Photo by Mike Russo/Independent Newspapers

Money raised at a June 28 car wash will go toward restoration of this fire truck, one of the Sun City Fire Department's two original trucks, which was recently reacquired from the fire department in San Luis, Mexico. From left are Tim Van Scoter, battalion chief; Ken Swick, battalion chief; and Manuel Montez, engineer.

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SATURDAY, JUNE 21, 2003

Carwash to raise funds to fix up old firetruck

SUN CITY — A benefit carwash is scheduled for next Saturday to raise funds to refurbish the community's first firetruck, a 1973 pumper.

The event is set for 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Sun City Fire Station, 17017 N. 99th Ave.

The money will be used to repair and restore the truck to its original condition for use in public displays and special events.

The truck, an American La France, was one of two identical vehicles used in Sun City until 1982.

It has been donated to the community by Cuerpo Rural de Bomberos, a fire department in San Luis, Sonora.

Donations of parts to restore the firetruck are also being requested. For more information, call (623) 974-2321.

Fire chief to head planning committee

By **Lindsey Remington**
Independent Newspapers

The Sun City Fire District Board of Directors unanimously approved the formation of an ad hoc planning committee to prepare a long-range fiscal plan for the district, at its regular board meeting June 17.

The board appointed Fire Chief Jim Sebert to head the committee. Board Vice Chairman Ed George, Board Member Jim Schmidt and four members of the Sun City firefighters' staff will comprise the rest of the committee.

"I'm pleased we're going to go forward with this," said board member Thomas Stroozas.

The committee will prepare a long-range fiscal plan for the fire district and present its first report to the board in January.

In addition, the board unanimously adopted a \$7.3 million budget for 2003-2004, effective July 1.

The budget increased from \$6.6 million last year, and the estimated property tax rate will be 2.41 percent, up from 2.24 percent last year.

For example, the tax on a home with an assessed valuation of \$100,000 would be \$241 a year, an increase of about \$17 from this year.

However, the estimated tax rate could change, depending on property valuations from the Maricopa County Assessor's Office.

The office doesn't have to have the assessments finalized until August.

Taxpayers won't see an increase on their bills until September, and revenues from the tax increase won't be collected until October or November.

Some reasons for the increase in the budget were higher fuel costs, an increase in insurance costs of about \$100,000, and building costs.

The Sun City West Fire District Governing Board also unanimously approved its 2003-2004 budget at its regular board meeting last week, held June 19.

It adopted a \$7.5 million budget, up 21 percent from the \$6.2 million budget last year.

The tax rate would also increase to 2.24 percent from 2.16 percent this year, which equals an 8.5-cent increase per \$100 of secondary assessed valuation.

Therefore, a Sun City West owner of a home with a \$100,000 assessed valuation would pay \$224 a year, which is \$8.52 more in fire district tax than this year.

Part of the reason the tax rate is significantly smaller than the increase in the budget is because the district doubled what it will charge for ambulance services.

The current fee the district charges to transport a patient will increase from \$372 to \$850, generating about \$1.1 to \$1.2 million.

However, the fee for ambulance service involves no out-of-pocket cost for the patient.

In the case of Medicare patients, if the patients don't have supplemental coverage, the fire district will absorb the difference between the bill and what Medicare pays.

For non-Medicare patients, health insurance generally covers all or a portion of the cost of an ambulance. Any remainder that is not covered by insurance will be absorbed by the district.

Other added revenues are accounted for by an expected rise in the district's assessed valuation and fees from the Corte Bella subdivision. The subdivision, located northwest of Sun City West, will be paying Sun City West to provide fire protection.

Factors contributing to the budget increase include a 32.5 percent rate increase in the communications contract with Phoenix Fire Department for dispatch services

and radio equipment, a \$218,000 increase in the capital

purchase/improvement/reserve fund, an increase of \$132,016 in state pension contributions, which is set by the Arizona Pension Board, and a cost of \$147,380 for complying with federally mandated public safety communication system.

In other business, the board approved a mutual-aid agreement for fire protection with Luke Air Force Base.

The agreement, which is renewed annually, requires SCWFD to provide fire protection to the base in cooperation with 23 other fire departments around the Valley, said Fire Marshal Jim Hegar.

Fire district's proposed budget up nearly 10%

By **Mike Russo**
Independent Newspapers

A budget of \$7.3 million for 2003-04 has been proposed by the Sun City Fire District Board of Directors.

That would represent an increase of 9.97 percent from the 2002-03 budget of \$6.64 million.

The actual tentative budget cannot be presented for consideration and advertising until the fire district obtains definitive health insurance information.

"Blue Cross/Blue Shield cannot give us a rate before 60 days prior to the start of the new fiscal year," explained the Rev. Irv Mitchell, board chairman. "That would be about May 1."

Rev. Mitchell explained that the board can only decrease the tentative budget once it is advertised, not increase it.

"We do not think Blue Cross will decrease our insurance expenses," Rev. Mitchell said.

Rev. Mitchell said the board anticipates a health insurance rate increase of \$40,000 or more for the coming year.

In addition to the rising insurance rates, factors contributing to the higher budget include anticipation that fuel prices will remain high, plans to purchase a vehicle and fire apparatus, and a 2.75 percent wage increase.

"The union asked for 3 percent, but we could only go to 2 and 3/4 percent," Rev. Mitchell said.

The fuel budget was increased by \$10,000 for next year, Rev. Mitchell noted.

The department will be purchasing four carbon monoxide monitors at a cost

See Budget — Page 7

Budget

Continued From Page 1

"I don't think (the state) should diminish field trips. They are crucial," said Ms. Flax, a former DUSD governing board member.

She said no has ever said to her they did not support funding field trips.

Rep. Gray said the bill's language states that tax credit money may be used for out-of-state competition events, not recreational or amusement activities.

Taxpayers do not have to

designate where the tax credit funds go. Currently, school principals determine where non-designated donations would be best used.

Rep. Gray's bill would take that control out of principals' hands and place it into school site councils' hands.

"Non-designated money that

comes in will be given to site councils, and they will determine where it will go and how it will be spent," Rep. Gray said. "This gives more of a voice for everyone, because there are parents and teachers who serve on the site councils."

Ms. Ruiz will be in charge of future tax credit campaigns in

SC fire board boosts rates

2003-'04: Plan calls for 10.7% budget hike

ERIN REEP
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The Sun City Fire Board adopted a \$7.3 million budget for 2003-04 that will increase the cost of fire protection to offset a "significant" increase in employee health insurance and rising fuel prices.

Based on preliminary figures, the owner of a \$100,000 home will see an increase of about \$17, from \$224 to \$241, said Chairman Irv Mitchell. This is contingent upon final adoption — following 30 days for public consideration — of the district's budget on June 17 and final property value assessment figures by Maricopa County, said Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

The budget is proposed at \$7,345,399, up \$707,376 or 10.7 percent over last year's \$6.6 million budget. The largest increases were made in operations expenses, with

IF YOU GO

- **WHAT:** Sun City Fire Board meeting
- **WHEN:** 9:30 a.m. June 17
- **WHERE:** Board room of the Sun City Fire District, 17017 N. 99th Ave. For information, call 974-2321.

more money added for communications, equipment and medical supplies.

Under communications costs, approximately \$20,000 was added to cover the increases the Sun City Fire Department will pay Phoenix as a per-call dispatch fee. Phoenix has raised the price it charges the department on a per-call basis, Mitchell said.

Funding for the department's capital reserves, which provides for long-term planning for large expenses such as fire trucks and equipment needed every few years, increased by \$165,000.

Sebert said the costs of equipment such as fire trucks are continually increasing, and boosting the

See FIRE, A5

From A1

capital reserves helps to cover those the costs. The department last purchased a fire engine for \$365,000 in 1998, Sebert said.

"The same truck today is \$420,000," he said.

Sebert said increases in personnel costs added to expenses. Rising costs in employees' health insurance plans added \$80,000 to the budget.

"We did face significant increases this year," Sebert said.

Additionally, employees' cost-of-living increases buoyed the budget, as did increases in pay grades given to employees.

Other budget items included funding for increased fuel costs and increased mileage and wear and tear on fire trucks. The fleet of trucks is responding to more and more calls each

year, Sebert said.

"In 10 years, we're putting more than 100,000 miles on our trucks," he said.

The fire trucks respond to "upwards of 35 calls a day," Sebert said. With the high gas prices, "unfortunately, it really did hit our pocketbooks this year."

Mitchell said board members successfully compromised on technical points in the budget. "Everybody had to give a little and take a little," he said.

The budget will be posted at Station 131 and in local newspapers for the next 30 days. Members of the public may address the board on the budget, and the board will take a final vote for its approval at the next regular meeting on June 17.

In other Sun City fire board news:

- The department responded to 721 calls for the month — four fires, 577 rescue and emergency medical

services calls; two hazardous conditions; 100 service calls; 25 good intent calls; and 13 false alarms or false calls.

- The board discussed improved security measures, such as new gates and locks and renovations at the stations. Work at Station 131 is complete, renovations at Station 132 are half complete and a locksmith has begun evaluations for work to be done at Station 133, Sebert said. Within the next 30 days, a security gate will be installed at Station 132, he said.

- Board member Jim Schmidt and Sebert proposed the replacement of leased telephone lines with a new microwave wireless data network.

Sun City Fire Department currently pays \$700-\$800 a month to lease telephone lines, Schmidt said. The new wireless network will cost an estimated \$39,000.

"We can pay that off in 4½

years by going to microwave," Schmidt said.

The funding for the wireless network will come from the capital reserve fund that is used for future projects, Sebert said. He estimated that within four years, the system would save the department about \$9,000 annually on utilities costs.

Creative Communications, a Motorola service shop that offers wireless service through Motorola, would install the system at all Sun City Fire stations and at the fire chief's home, Schmidt said.

The wireless network would make data transmission within the department 10 times faster, ensure greater privacy and save the department money, Sebert said in an interview Tuesday afternoon.

Erin Reep can be reached at 876-2532 or at ereep@aztrib.com

Fire district board increases tax rate

By **Chris Seggerman**
Independent Newspapers

At their regular meeting, the Sun City Fire District Board voted to approve a budget of \$7.3 million for 2003-04, a increase of more than 10 percent over last year's \$6.6 million, which will require an increase in the rate at which residents are taxed for fire protection.

The new estimated property tax rate will be 2.41 percent, up from last year's rate of 2.24 percent.

For a home with an assessed valuation of \$100,000, taxes would be \$241, up about \$17, or 7.5 percent, over last year.

However, the estimated tax rate could change, depending on property valuations from the Maricopa County Assessor's Office.

"Right now, we're sort of shooting from the hip," said Fire Chief James Sebert. "It's a function of the taxing process that not only affects the fire department, but every other taxing entity in the state."

Chief Sebert said the district sets the amount of money it requires in the budget and then submits this to the Maricopa County

Board of Supervisors for approval.

When describing the budget, Fire Chief James Sebert said the board had faced some significant expense increases, including employee benefits and rising costs of building maintenance.

Mr. Sebert said Sun City's growing population has led to more and more calls responding to 911 emergencies.

"Despite what some people think, we don't go up and ring doorbells and ask if they want to be sick that day," Mr. Sebert said.

The budget will now be advertised in newspapers, as well as posted at the station. The board is slated to adopt the budget at a meeting June 17.

"I think we did a good job, every single one of us," commented Tom Stroozas, board treasurer.

In other business, the board voted to adopt a wireless telephone service from Creative Communications.

According to Assistant Fire Chief James Schmidt, the district's phone bills currently run \$700 to \$800

See **Budget** — Page 7

Budget

Continued From Page 1
per month. The cost of a wireless microwave service will be \$39,000.

The board voted to accept a plan with no payments for 12 months after an initial payment.

Creative Communications is backed by Motorola,

which currently supplies maintenance to the district's communication equipment.

Mr. Schmidt also reported the near-completion of the renovation of Fire Station 132.

"It's something that needed to be done a long time ago," Mr. Schmidt said of the completion. "Now on to the next station, if we can find the money."

Historic engine returns home

By **Mike Russo**
Independent Newspapers

Firefighter Manuel Montez remembers fondly the pride with which the neophyte Sun City fire district accepted delivery of its first two fire trucks in September 1973.

The department is equally excited about recently reacquiring one of those two historic pumpers from a department in San Luis, Mexico.

"It is a big thing for the department to reacquire the truck," said Mr. Montez, who worked in Sun City when fire service was provided by Rural Metro.

"It is important to bring back some history," said Tim

Van Scoter, battalion chief, who is coordinating efforts to restore the vehicle. "It will be a nice project for the group."

The truck was one of two pumpers purchased for approximately \$50,000 each in 1973, at the time the Sun City Fire District was formed, said Ken Swick, Sun City Fire District battalion chief. Mr. Swick was hired by the department about a month after the trucks were purchased.

The trucks were used in Sun City until being sold, for a total of \$77,500, to the Bullhead City Fire District in 1982.

Bullhead City's department purchased the vehicles to replace a 1956 GMC pumper

that was sold to the Golden Shores Fire District, according to Bill Wagner, Bullhead City's fire chief at the time.

Golden Shores is an unincorporated community south of Bullhead City, Ariz., a small city on the Colorado River across from Laughlin, Nev.

Mr. Wagner retired from his post with the fire department in 1998 and is currently a state representative from District 3.

"The first thing we had to do was paint them white," recalled Mr. Wagner. "We added the blue stripe in 1989."

San Luis later changed the stripe to green, its present

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Engine

Continued From Page 1
color.

"I think at that time, the Sun City Fire District was looking at the fact that they (the trucks) were big and heavy rigs and were tough on the streets," Mr. Wagner said. "They were going to something lighter, and Bullhead City was looking for newer equipment."

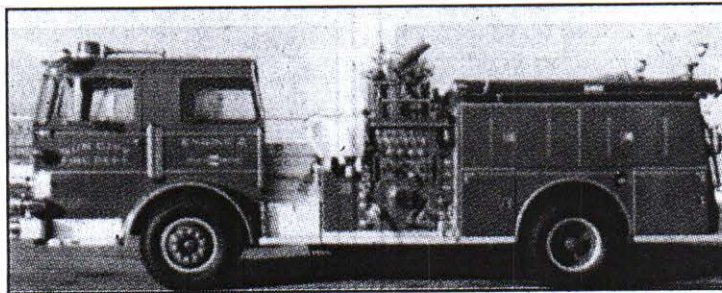
Bullhead City got more than 10 years of service out of the two trucks before selling them to the San Luis department for \$3,000 in the early 1990s, Mr. Wagner said. "They were good, dependable vehicles," he said.

Mr. Wagner said Bullhead City was able to get so many years of use from the trucks because the department has a very aggressive maintenance program.

The Sun City firefighters now want to restore the truck to a semblance of its former glory.

"It will not be fully operational, but we want to be able to drive it in parades and use it for special events," Mr. Van Scoter said.

Much of the restoration



Submitted photo

This is how Sun City Engine 2 appeared when originally purchased by the Sun City Fire District in September 1973.

work will be done by firefighters in their off-duty hours.

The firefighters have begun a fund-raising campaign to pay for the restoration.

"We want to get the community involved," Van Scoter said.

Donations are tax deductible and may be made to the Fire Truck Restoration Fund. They may be sent to or dropped off at Fire Station No. 131, 17017 N. 99th Ave., Sun City, AZ 85351. An account has been established at Well Fargo Bank.

The goal is to restore the truck within the next year and a half, said Mr. Van Scoter.

The problem is, since the truck does not run, it is difficult to assess how much work is needed to restore it, Mr.

Swick noted.

The reacquisition was aided greatly by the efforts of Bill Volk, fire chief of the Blue Ridge Ranger District north of Payson, according to Mr. Van Scoter.

"He got us in touch with the San Luis Fire Department," Mr. Van Scoter explained. Mr. Volk had been a firefighter in Yuma, Ariz., just a few miles north of San Luis, so he was aware of the truck's location.

The San Luis firefighters gave the truck to their Sun City counterparts. The only cost involved was \$850 to have the truck towed.

"They had not used the truck for a couple of years, so they gave it to us," Mr. Van

Scoter said. "It sat parked across the street from the fire station. Amazingly, none of the windows were broken, and there was no graffiti on the truck."

The Sun City fire department reciprocated by donating to San Luis some obsolete equipment that did not meet current specifications, according to Mr. Van Scoter.

"Mexican fire departments have basically no funding," Mr. Van Scoter said. "So, we wanted to help them out."

The two departments have forged a bond.

"We will try and help them when we can," Mr. Van Scoter said.

Members of the San Luis Fire Department visited Sun City a few months ago to get a first-hand look at the department's procedures.

While the Sun City firefighters realize they still have a great deal of work to do to get the truck restored, they have cleared the major hurdle.

"The biggest issue is to have it in our possession," Mr. Swick said. "Now that we have it, we can proceed."



Photo by Mike Russo/Independent Newspapers

Members of the Sun City Fire Department pose with one of the department's two original trucks, which was recently reacquired from the fire department in San Luis, Mexico. From left are Tim Van Scoter, battalion chief; Ken Swick, battalion chief; and Manuel Montez, engineer.

DAILY NEWS-SUN

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16, 2003

Piece of history rolls into town

REV THAT ENGINE: Sun City Fire Department retrieves truck used in '70s

MICHAEL MARESH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

A small piece of Sun City's past is back in place, thanks to the San Luis Fire Department in Mexico.

The Cuerpo Rural De Bomberos fire unit donated one of the two 1973 American La France Pumper Trucks that one time rolled down the streets of the retirement

FIRE DEPARTMENT TRUCK RESTORATION FUND

■ **HOW TO CONTRIBUTE:** Send donations to the Sun City Fire District at 17017 N. 99th Ave., Sun City, AZ 85373.

Residents donating \$100 or more will become members of the Sun City Fire Department Engine 1 crew with their names commemoratively listed on a special plaque to be displayed on the restored truck.

community.

Sun City Fire Battalion Chief Ron Gilbert is one of the few remaining firefighters who remembers the fire trucks when they were almost new to the department 30 years ago.

Gilbert joined the department in 1974, and said he was impressed with the then-new firefighting vehicles.

"They are outdated for the United States, but for Mexico they are the state of the art," Gilbert said.

Gilbert said the fire trucks were purchased after the Lakes Club fire in February 1972, but added he is unsure if that is the reason the engines were brought.

See HISTORY, A9



Firefighter Michael O'Neill checks out a 1973 American La France Pumper truck used in Sun City in the '70s and donated back recently by the Cuerpo Rural De Bomberos fire unit in San Luis, Mexico.

MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

OVER

From A1

"They brought them for better service," Gilbert said.

The second pumper from Sun City continues to serve as the primary vehicle San Luis uses for emergency purposes.

Gilbert said getting the fire engine back will let the community see a little part of Sun City's history.

He said the two identical fire trucks served the community well from 1973 to 1982 before being sold to the Bullhead City Fire Department.

"It is not that they are obsolete," he said. "The standard fire-department equipment has changed."

Gilbert said it is now mandated for firefighters in the United States to be enclosed inside the cabs of trucks.

Sun City firefighter Michael O'Neill said the fire engines the department now uses are three times as large as the original vehicles.

"The idea is to bring back the history and use it in parades or something," he said. "Tradition is real big in

the fire service."

Bullhead City used the two trucks until 1995 before donating them to San Luis. And nearly two years ago, Battalion Chief Tim Van Scooter sent a letter to the Bullhead City fire chief to find out what happened to the trucks, hoping to bring one of them back to the community.

Rural De Bomberos Fire Chief Francisco Tabanico offered to donate the truck that was not operational to Sun City.

The fire district was formed in 1966, but managerial changes as well as other decisions resulted in the loss of much of the history of the Sun City Fire Department.

Gilbert said bringing back one of the original fire trucks restores some of that history. The battalion chief said a lot of work still lies ahead, since the department wants to return the truck to its original state.

The truck is now white, and Gilbert said restoring it to the original red will be simple.

"The hard part will be getting the motor going," he



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

A flatbed truck hauled this bumper truck from Mexico to Sun City, where it was used from 1973 until 1995. The fire department plans to restore it.

said. "We need to know what it will take to get it going."

The Sun City Fire Department is accepting donations to help restore the truck to

its original condition.

Michael Maresh can be reached at 876-2513 or mmaresh@aztrib.com.

Local fire departments in lock-down mode

By Mike Russo
Independent Newspapers

The time-honored tradition of casually dropping by the local firehouse to visit with firefighters, express your appreciation for their service or have your blood pressure checked has to be placed on hold.

With the war with Iraq beginning, the fire departments of Sun City and Sun City West began locking all doors on a full-time basis, which is diametrically opposed to the departments' normal visitor-friendly operating procedures.

Both departments last week were preparing for a heightened state of alert.

"We are tightening down stuff," said Jim Heger, Sun City West fire marshal. "We are locking the station doors, making sure the bay doors are locked when we leave on a call and keeping bay doors locked so people cannot wander around the stations.

"We are also making sure the vehicles are locked at all times," he continued. "We implemented these changes when the last code orange was in effect. We did not reduce security when we returned to yellow alert."

Similar measures are being taken in Sun City, according to Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

"What we did two weeks ago, when we first went on an orange alert, was lock all

the doors to the stations," Chief Sebert said.

"The lobby was locked, and visitors must ring the bell and show identification to gain access," explained Capt. Ron Clark.

"Everyone must be escorted through the station to meet federal guidelines," Chief Sebert added. "No one will be allowed to wander around the station."

One of the problems with residents making appointments for visits to the fire stations, for such services as blood pressure checks, is the department's inability to guarantee personnel will be present at the designated time.

"We can't guarantee an appointment because of our calls," Chief Sebert said.

The Sun City West Fire Department is not as limited as Sun City when it comes to continuing to offer blood pressure checks.

"We will continue to do what we are doing," Mr. Heger said. "It's in a secure area."

Appointments are not required, according to Mr. Heger.

"We do 400 to 600 per month," Mr. Heger said.

Garage doors at all stations in both fire districts are now left down and locked at all times.

Security has also been heightened when the departments are on calls.

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Fire

Continued From Page 5

Both departments are working closely with their respective posses to have fire department vehicles and equipment secured at call sites.

"We have a very good relationship with the posse," Mr. Heger said. "They respond to our calls if they are on duty. A posse member stays outside with our vehicle to make sure it is secure."

"As for security of vehicles when we are out in the field delivering services, we are discussing with the posse to have them provide security under those circumstances, at least during their patrol hours," Chief Sebert said.

Both departments are remaining vigilant in watching for anything suspicious around their facilities.

"We are always looking for anything suspicious, like packages left outside the building," Mr. Heger said.

Sun City Fire Department Shift Commander Ken Swick said training continues on the handling of hazardous materials and possible bio-chemicals.

"We included that in our training about two years ago," Chief Sebert said. "We have done classroom and field training. The training involved such things as personal protection, like securing their turnout gear. We have them use duct tape to secure the openings on the sleeves of the coats and tape the opening of their boots."

Sun City Fire District Board member Paul Saunders, a former longtime firefighter, said he believes the measures may be a bit extreme and is concerned they may project an image of

unfriendliness.

"I would like to see us post signs at the doors alerting the residents of the restrictions," Mr. Saunders said.

"This is changing the way we deal with the public," he added. "In the 50 some years I have been associated with firefighting, we have always welcomed the public into our house."

"Hopefully the public will understand and won't develop the feeling that we are being unfriendly," Chief Sebert said. "We don't want to be seen as unfriendly."

Should the Sun City Fire Department have to go to a red alert, the highest level, "we would have to provide 24-hour security at our stations," Chief Sebert said. "We would have to control access to equipment."

One of the methods of controlling access to the stations would be the installation of barricades in the driveways, to deter possible terror attacks, Chief Sebert noted.

Should the level of security be further heightened, it would cause a slight problem conducting monthly board meetings, since Fire Station No. 132, where the meetings are normally held, would be locked down.

"We could move the meetings off site," Chief Sebert said. "We are obligated by law to conduct the meetings."

Mr. Heger said Sun City West's Fire Department has yet to formulate a plan to handle a red alert.

Meanwhile, Sun City firefighters Dave Evans and John Ramsey have been activated by the National Guard or Reserves, and the department faces the potential loss of up to four more firefighters to military activation, according to Chief Sebert.

The Sun City West Fire Department has no one in the Guard or Reserves, Mr. Heger said.

Sun City station gets facelift

BOARD: Work on Station 132 wraps up in April

KATY O'GRADY
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City firefighters will have a little more elbow room at Station 132 next month.

A renovation project that began there last year to accommodate more firefighters and provide separate quarters for male and female personnel is expected to be complete April 11.

The station was built in 1975.

Sun City Fire District board member James Schmidt said the project came in at \$794,625, just below its projected \$800,000 cost. An additional \$20,000 to \$25,000 worth of furnishings also will be required, he said.

Sun City Fire Board Chairman Irv Mitchell commended Schmidt and Director Ed George for their work on the project, noting it was a huge project for just two members to tackle.

The board voted not to install a screen wall at the station. Estimated to cost about \$3,000, the wall would have hidden electrical conduit and provided other aesthetic improvements, but members agreed the cost was too high, and they could always build it later, probably cheaper.

In other Sun City Fire Board action Tuesday:

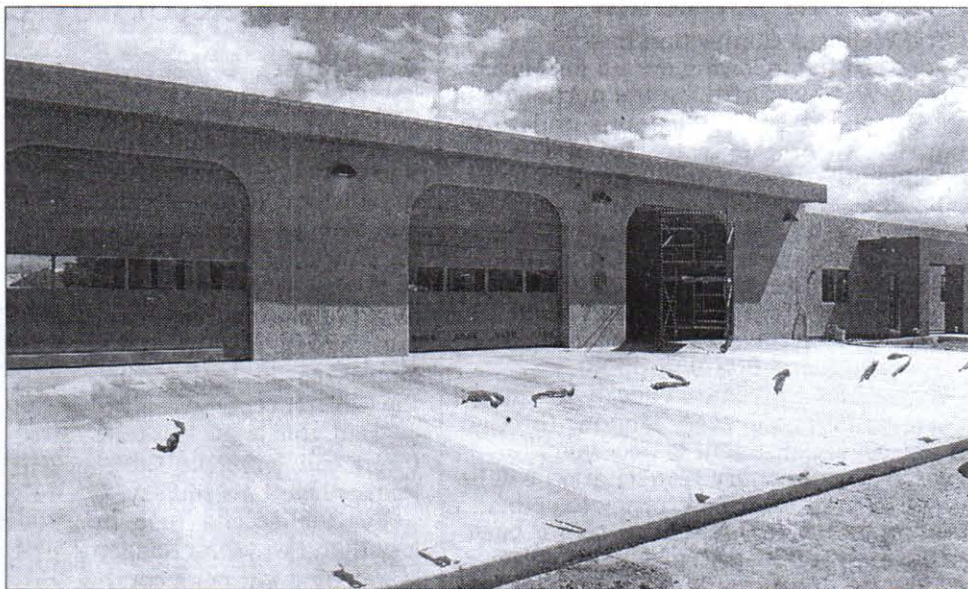
- Fire officials reported that the climbing gas prices are starting to have an impact at the district, although specific costs were not available.

In February, the department used almost 1,417 gallons of unleaded and diesel fuel to drive almost 15,200 miles.

A special fuel allowance was put in the 2002 budget following 9-11 and again this year, and that should help cover the increased costs, said Fire Chief Jim Sebert. Similar funding will be requested for next year, he said.

- The board adopted its amended bylaws.

The more significant changes include:



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City Fire Station 2 is undergoing a \$800,000 remodeling job.

Sun City Fire Department's February Summary

- The department's 718 calls for the month broke down as follows: five fires, 550 rescue and emergency medical services calls; five hazardous conditions; 106 service calls; 31 good intent calls; 17 false alarms or false calls; three flood assessments and one unidentified incident.

- The department also responded to 211 automatic aid requests elsewhere in the Northwest Valley.

Other Northwest Valley agencies responded to Sun City 163 times under the same automatic aid

agreement.

- The department conducted 184 inspections, with the major violator being out-of-date or non-functioning portable fire extinguishers.

- More than 1,100 people were served by the department's community education division by taking advantage of services such as participating in a CPR class, getting a smoke-detector installed, hearing a presentation, getting their blood pressure checked or tapping into other services.

requiring a preliminary budget by April 1 instead of May 1; and allowing the board's standing committees to spend up to \$2,500 without board approval as opposed to the previous limit of \$500.

"Bylaws are always a work in progress so we'll probably be back at them," Mitchell said.

- Along with its bylaws, the board adopted its first code of conduct. Among other characteristics, the code says board members: understand business principles; have integrity; have a sense of humor; have vision; are politically aware and understand the community; are flexible and open-minded; and respect decisions they might not necessarily like.

- Capt. Ron Clark told the board he is preparing a safety awards program to reward personnel for not having accidents and maintaining a safe work environment.

"We've had an escalating amount of injuries and minor incidents with our apparatus," Clark said.

Eliminating lost time for just two injuries will pay for the program in one year, Clark said. Start-up costs are estimated at \$2,800.

Sebert said Clark's work has been recognized elsewhere in Arizona as a possible model. "I hope in this tight economy we'll find a way to come up with a few dollars," he said.

Mitchell said he hopes to have the project adopted and funded by July 1.

IF YOU GO

- **WHAT:** Next Sun City Fire Board meeting.
- **WHEN:** 9:30 a.m. April 15
- **WHERE:** Board room of the Sun City Fire District, 17017 N. 99th Ave. For information, call 974-2321.

CLOSE UP



Photo by Mike Russo/Independent Newspapers

Sun City Fire Department engineer Fred Ohrt, left, and Rich Hayes, firefighter/paramedic, hone their lifesaving skills on Resusi Annie. More than 76 percent of the department's calls last year were medical in nature.

RECORD-SETTING YEAR

Fire district responds to record number of calls

By **Mike Russo**
Independent Newspapers

Last year was another record-breaking year for the Sun City Fire District.

Call volume was up 3.66 percent over last year, as firefighters responded to nearly 30 calls per day, more than three-fourths of those involving emergency medical situations.

The department responded to a total of 10,726 calls in 2002, or 29.39 calls per day. That was up from 10,347 calls in 2001 and 9,600 in 2000.

Of the calls, 8,221 were responses in Sun City and 2,505 were in response to calls from other departments for automatic/mutual aid.

The vast majority of the department's calls continue to be medical in nature. The department responded to 6,264 medical calls during the year, accounting for 76.19 percent of its call volume.

Although total medical calls were up from the previous year's 6,205, the percent of total calls actually decreased, continuing a

trend in recent years. Medical calls accounted for 77.15 percent of all calls for 2001. Five years ago, 81 or 82 percent of the department's calls were for medical assistance, according to Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

The chief attributes part of the decline to different bookkeeping methods used in the last couple of years.

"Some of the calls that used to be classified as medical are now considered person in distress calls," Chief Sebert said.

Cardiac calls accounted for 10.63 percent of the total, 874, and was the single greatest classification of medical calls.

Slightly more than half the call volume increase involved automatic/mutual aid responses. Sun City firefighters responded to 2,505 calls outside the community, an increase of 200 from 2001, as part of its automatic/mutual aid obligations.

The chief said the mutual aid system provides a great benefit to the Sun City department.

"Sun City does not have enough calls to warrant having its own hazardous mate-

rials team, so we use a unit from Glendale or Phoenix," he said.

"We recognize the value of mutual aid and how we benefit as much as we provide service," said Paul Saunders, Sun City Fire District board member.

Chief Sebert said the Sun City Fire Department probably responds to as many calls outside the community as neighboring fire departments respond to Sun City calls.

"It's probably very close to a wash," he said.

Sun City firefighters responded to 92 fire calls for the year, up from 79 the previous year. Of the fire calls, 22 were of a structural variety and 11 were vehicle fires.

Chief Sebert said he believed the annexation of the Citrus Point subdivision into the fire district had minimal impact on call volume.

"Citrus Point has had a minor impact on our call volume," he said, although he was not certain how many responses the department made to the community since the report does not differentiate where calls are made within the fire district.

"The homes are newer and the residents are younger, so fewer calls are required," Chief Sebert explained.

"It is not a burden and the \$60,000 we receive in revenue is helpful," Chief Sebert continued. "Even if we are getting 30 calls a year from Citrus Point, it was a wise move for the district to annex the subdivision.

The remainder of the department's calls were for service, hazardous conditions, false alarms and false calls, and miscellaneous.

Fire District loans car seats

Service is free to district residents

By **Mike Russo**
Independent Newspapers

With the holidays approaching, Sun Citians can look forward to visits by family members, including grandchildren.

This, at times, poses a problem for some Sun Citians. They are ill-prepared to safely confine youngsters riding in a vehicle. They do not have child safety seats and sometimes risk transporting children without being properly restrained.

To alleviate this problem, the Sun City Fire District has implemented a new program to aid Sun City residents — a Child Safety Seat Loaner Program.

The service is available to all residents of the Sun City Fire District, which includes Youngtown and Citrus Point. There is no charge.

"We have had numerous requests to borrow child seats so, to accommodate our citizens, we have implemented this program," explained firefighter Pat Frey, who is in charge of the

program. "We have had requests for this for years. We had been getting three or four calls a month for this type of service.

"Sun City residents have a need for child car seats when their grandchildren visit," he continued.

Funding for the car seat loaner program was provided by a grant from the Governor's Office on Highway Safety, according to Mr. Frey.

The National Highway Transportation and Safety
See Safety— Page 8



Photo by Mike Russo/Independent Newspapers

Sun City firefighter Pay Frey adjusts a car seat for Tyler Johnston, 2.

Safety

Continued From Page 1

Administration recommends all children 12 and under be properly restrained in the backseat of a vehicle.

The loaner program has been added to the child safety inspection and installation program conducted by the fire department.

"Our highest priority is the safety of the children, so we have certain require-

ments that need to be followed in order for us to continue to provide this service," Mr. Frey said.

He noted that children under the age of 5 and weighing less than 100 pounds are required to be restrained in a car seat.

Reservations are required to reserve a car seat, and may be made by calling the district administration office at 974-2321 between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m.

"Once you call, a certified seat technician will return

your call in about week prior to when you need to borrow the seat to schedule a time for you to come in," Mr. Frey said.

The following information must be provided: your name, telephone number, date the seat is needed, age and weight of the child using the seat.

The fire department has two types of seat available for loan, Mr. Frey noted.

"We have 10 convertible seats and six high backs," he said. "They will work for

newborns up to children 5 years old and weighing 100 pounds."

Seats may be borrowed for up to 90 days, the number of days children under the age of 19 are allowed to visit.

Mr. Frey said the program has been well received already, even without publicity.

"We have had two requests since we started about a week ago without the word even getting out," Mr. Frey said.

Ready, aim, fire!

FLAME OUT: SC Fire Department gives lessons on home fire safety

JOHN SOKOLICH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

A small fire breaks out at your home and you reach under the sink to fetch the fire extinguisher to douse the flames.

You pull the pin, point the hose and squeeze the nozzle but nothing happens.

It's a bad time to realize that you should have had the device recharged — something that should be done yearly and checked monthly.

Wednesday, the Sun City Fire Department recharged dozens of fire extinguishers and gave demonstrations of proper use of the devices to residents in an effort to bring awareness to the importance of having an up-to-date extinguisher.

"This is a really great program and something that is very important to everyone," said Stacy Bodensteadt of the fire department. "We are making sure that all the residents know how to use the extinguishers in the case of an emergency so they can be safe."

Fire extinguishers are a good idea for all homeowners because they offer a first line of defense, but they are not a replacement for calling the fire department.

When purchasing a fire extinguisher, it is important to realize that there are different extinguishers for different types of fires.

Fires have three classifications: A, B and C.

Class A fires are from ordinary combustibles, such as wood, paper or cloth. Class B fires are from flammable liquids, such as gas, oil, grease or kerosene. Class C fires are from energized electrical equipment such as wiring, fuse boxes, machinery and



STEVE CHERNEK / DAILY NEWS-SUN

Steve Rogers, left, of Roadrunner Fire and Safety Equipment shows Dorothy Sadler how to use a fire extinguisher at the Sun City Fire Department Wednesday.

power cords.

Some fire extinguishers are meant for just one class of fire or possibly two. If you own such an extinguisher, you should not try to use it on a fire for which it is not rated. There are other fire extinguishers rated for all classes of fires; these are strongly recommended for home use.

When properly charged and used, fire extinguishers can put out small fires or create enough room for an escape route in the event of a large fire. However, they need to be used correctly to be effective.

The fire department offered residents the following suggestions for proper fire extinguisher use:

OVER



STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Steve Rogers of Roadrunner Fire and Safety Equipment shows Dorothy Sadler how to tell if her fire extinguisher is ready to use at the Sun City Fire Department Wednesday.

- Pull the pin: Hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointed away from you. Pulling the pin will break the small, plastic safety ring making the extinguisher ready to discharge.

- Aim low: Stand six to eight feet away from the fire and point the extinguisher at its base — the lowest point of the fire closest to you.

- Squeeze the lever: This will expel the extinguishing agent through the nozzle. Hold it upright, not sideways or at any angle.

- Sweep side to side: As the extinguishing agent is expelled, sweep the nozzle from side to side. As the flames closest to you go out, move in and continue sweeping until all the fire is extinguished.

It is important to make sure that everyone is out of the house before using a fire extinguisher to ensure protection from a larger fire. Before using a fire extinguisher, the fire department should be called. A convenient, planned escape route out of the house should be available.

If the fire is spreading — especially in the direction of the escape route — get out of the house immediately.

John Sokolich can be reached at 876-2526 or jsokolich@aztrib.com.

Sun City Fire District implements safety program for students

Youngtown students targeted for safety

By **Mike Russo**
Independent Newspapers

The Sun City Fire District has expanded its community education program by reaching out to touch the youngest residents of its service area.

Stacey Bodenstedt, fire district community relations specialist, and other members of the fire department have begun instructing students of New Joy Charter School in Youngtown in safety.

"We will do this on a

monthly basis to help promote ... prevention education," Ms. Bodenstedt said.

The program is designed for children in grades kindergarten through 7.

The fire district has been providing fire service to Youngtown for 13 years, first on a contractual basis and since July 1, 2001, as annexed members of the fire district.

With the demographics of Youngtown changing and more younger families moving in, a charter school

opened last fall. The school administration felt it would be beneficial to have the students receive some safety training and the fire district was contacted to request its services.

"Being able to teach and educate individuals of all ages and abilities about safety is crucial to help prevent fire and health emergencies," Mr. Bodenstedt said.

Among the topics to be addressed by the program

See **Safety** — Page 2

Safety

Continued From Page 1

are dealing with a fire emergency, tools or toys and the importance of smoke alarms.

When dealing with a fire, "we explain to them the importance of staying low," Ms. Bodenstedt said. "The better air is down near the floor."

She will also cover the proper procedure for exiting a room when fire is present.

"When you come to a door, you should feel the door with the back of the hand to detect heat," Mr. Bodenstedt explained. "If the door is hot, the person should turn around and crawl to an alternate escape route.

"Using the back of your hand to feel the door keeps your palm and fingertips from getting burned because



Photo by Jeremy Pearlman/Independent Newspapers

Stacey Bodenstedt, Sun City Fire District community relations specialist, teaches Jared Ramirez, a student at the New Joy Charter School in Youngtown, the proper techniques of dealing with being afire.

you may need your hands to crawl to another exit," she continued. The U.S. Fire Administration recommends having two escape routes from each room, if possible, such as a door and window.

A key to escaping a fire "is to make sure you are aware of your surroundings," according to Ms. Bodenstedt.

An important strategy on teaching safety to children is making it fun, Ms. Bodenstedt noted.

"We will play a game called tools or toys, the object of the lesson is to have the children learn if an item is used as a tool or for play," Ms. Bodenstedt said.

In the game she uses items such as simulated matches, fake cigarette lighters and plastic tools and after placing them in the child's hands, she has the child identify the item and asks "can you play with it?"

Firefighters ignore gender differences

SUN CITIES:
Separate sleeping quarters unnecessary, officials say

JOHN SOKOLICH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

After serving as a firefighter in Sun City for 16 years, Sandy Young won't have to use the same toilet facilities as the men.

She will share a Station 132 bathroom with firefighter Jennifer Johnston, the second of three women firefighters in Sun City. The third is Sherry Wood, who works at Station 131 on Bell Road and 99th Avenue.

Station 132, located on 99th Avenue north of Peoria Avenue, is in the midst of renovations that will expand the station and make it more suitable for female firefighters.

The national trend for accommodating females in firefighter ranks is to provide separate sleeping and shower facilities for the males and females of departments, which is part of the reason Sun City is renovating the two-decade-old station.

Young said she is looking forward to the completion of the project, but more for the expansion of the team facility, rather than for a gender-specific reason. Her husband is a battalion chief in Glendale, where her son is also a firefighter, and a brother-in-law works at the Sun City Fire Department.

Young said being a female in a male-dominated force is not a problem for her: "I come from a family of firefighters."



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City Fire engineer Sandy Young checks the mileage on her truck for a monthly report. Young is one of two female firefighters who works out of Station 132, which is undergoing renovation.

Young said with her length of service, she just considers herself a firefighter and doesn't differentiate fire personnel by gender.

Her shiftmate Johnston agrees.

"It's nice to work with another female at the station, but I have never felt uncomfortable working with the guys," she said. "They treat me just like anyone else, and I treat them the same way, too. There are always differences between women and men, but it's really nothing that ever gets in the way."

During lunch at the fire station Friday, four crew members joked about gender relations in the department.

"There is not really

anything to say," Johnston said. "We are all the same."

Young talked about her service with the department, but didn't explain much about the challenges of sharing quarters with males.

Captain Mike Gobster said although the two genders work together, there isn't much to say about it, because all involved are one unit, one crew and one team. Separating the crew by sex is neither an option nor a consideration, he said, because the four make up a team that is judged by ability and success rather than gender or differences.

Sharing the cramped quarters of a trailer while the station is being gutted, Gobster

said, "All I see is people."

Gobster said having female firefighters has never caused a problem, because he considers everyone under his command and in all fire departments as equals. He said when renovations are complete at his station, female firefighters will have more privacy, but it also will be an improvement for everyone.

"The station was built in 1975, and was getting small for us," Gobster said. "When we first started in this area, there used to be about two calls per shift — now we average about eight a day. We head into Peoria on a regular basis."

On the same crew as

Johnston and Young, firefighter Jamie Soto said the fact that he works with two females was never a problem.

"There are women here?" he joked. "We are all on the same team. It doesn't matter. We all work and perform the same duties."

All the firefighters stationed at 132 said they are looking forward to the renovations, but they don't think the project was undertaken merely to accommodate female personnel. More showers and dormitory space are being added to the station, both to provide increased

privacy and to allow quicker turn-around time when a crew returns from a call.

"When a crew comes back, they need to clean up and shower," said Chief Jim Sebert of the Sun City Fire Department. "There is limited space at Station 132 right now, so the renovations are to make the facilities bigger, so the crew can get in and out faster and return to duty."

Although the renovations at the station will provide more privacy for female firefighters, in the Sun Cities,

See Local renovation, A5

OVER

From A1

male and female firefighters share dormitory space and are segregated only by crew assignment. For example, at the main fire station on Bell Road and 99th Avenue, ladder crews sleep in a different room from the engine crew because the two rarely have to respond to the same calls.

In Sun City West, EMS personnel — of which four of the 12 members are women — serve at the same stations as the fire crews; the bunks are all kept in the same room. There is a dress code at all community fire stations at night, though. All must wear shorts and a department-issue T-shirt.

With fire departments in other Valley cities reporting sexual harassment of some female firefighters over the last year or so, local fire officials say there haven't been any problems at their stations.

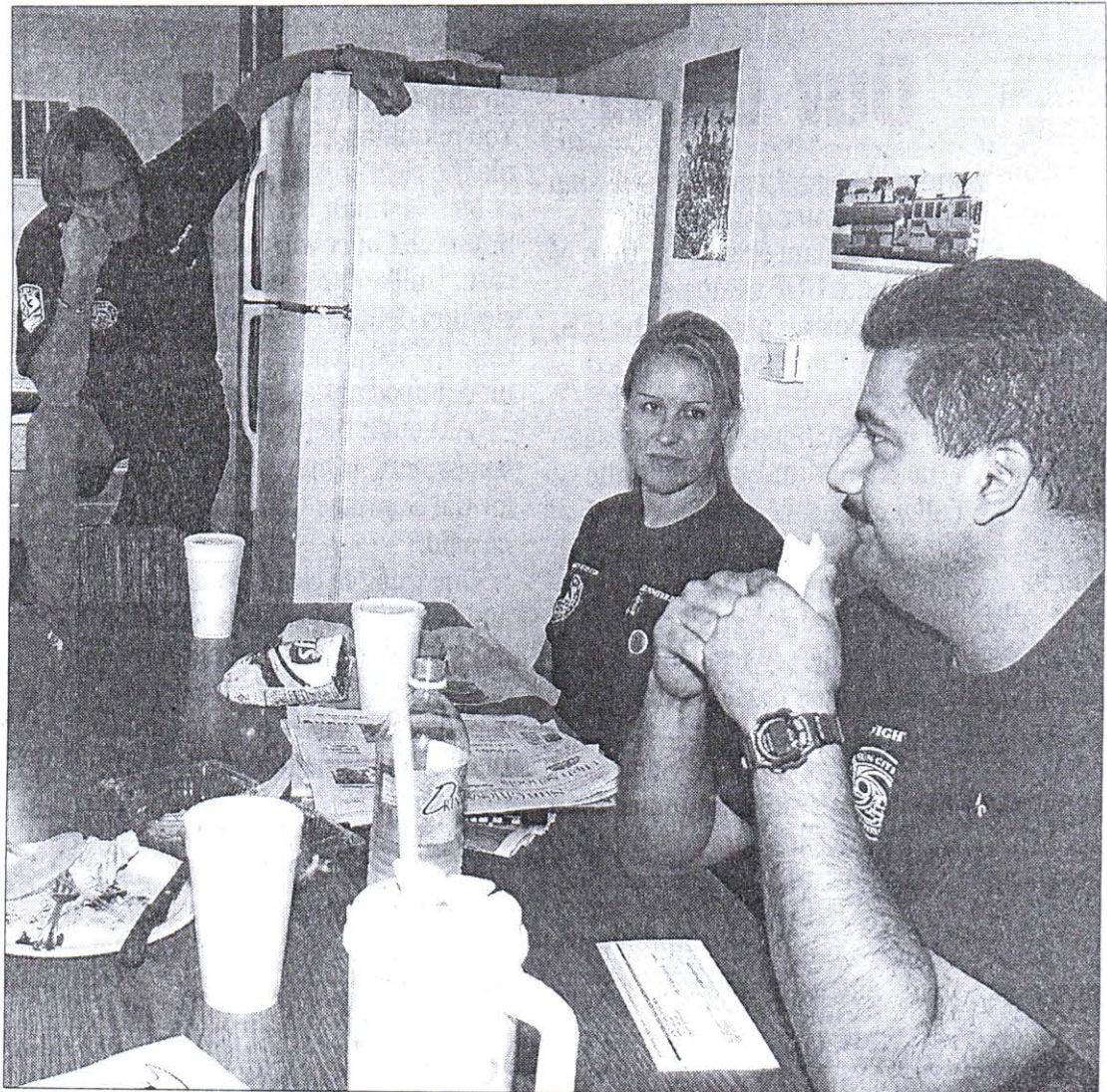
"I think the problems that occurred at other stations were because of poor supervision," Sebert said. "Here we have good supervision, and there is a general respect that everyone has for each other."

The respect is based on an understanding that the female firefighters in company crews do the same jobs as the male firefighters.

Chief Robert Biscoe of the Sun City West Fire Department said when firefighters train for certification, it isn't based on their abilities as a male or female, it's based on a person's ability to save lives and fight fires.

"When someone trains through the fire academy, we want to make sure they can get a person out of a burning building safely," he said. "It isn't based on the number of pushups or pull-ups a person can do. It's not based on sex, it's based on ability."

Fire officials from throughout the Northwest Valley praised the work female firefighters contribute to the community on a daily basis.



MOLLIE J. HOPPES/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Fire Capt. Mike Gobster, left, and firefighters Jennifer Johnston and Jaime Soto share 700-square-feet of living space on the B shift at Fire Station 132 in Sun City. The station is being remodeled to make more room for the firefighters and another truck, and will provide separate bathrooms for men and women.

"I know here in the retirement community there has been a lot of positive feedback about our female firefighters," Sebert said. "About half of the calls we get are for female victims, and I think they are more comfortable having a female emergency-crew member help them."

Sebert said the days of women trying to prove themselves to their male counterparts are over: "From what I've seen, the female firefighters are as good — if not more enthusiastic — about their jobs as their male counterparts."

Female firefighters were brought aboard immediately when Sun City first formed

its fire district in 1989, Sebert said, without much distinction between the men and women. Young was one of the women hired by the department. She had served the area with Rural-Metro Fire before the fire district was formed.

"We have privacy locks on our restrooms and showers," Sebert said. "It works kind of like the same way at home. When you go in there and want your privacy, you close the door and lock it. It's the same for the males and the females."

Most fire stations in use today were planned and built with a single-gender workforce in mind, according to the International Association

of Firefighters. Different fire departments have developed a variety of solutions to the challenges formed by inadequate facilities. The cheapest and easiest answers are usually the first to be implemented — a "men/women" or "occupied/unoccupied" flip sign installed on the door of a station's only restroom or shower or locks on the doors.

In the Northwest Valley, some of these solutions have worked well. Elsewhere in the country, some fire departments are considering building female- and male-only quarters. Such additions have not been needed locally, according to officials.

John Sokolich can be reached at 876-2526 or jsokolich@aztrib.com.

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT SEPTEMBER 25, 2002

Fire district agrees to buy traffic devices

Funds budgeted for last 3 years

By **Mike Russo**
Independent Newspapers

When responding to a life-threatening medical emergency, every second counts. In an effort to enhance response times to such emergencies, the Sun City Fire District Board of Directors approved during its Sept. 17 meeting the expenditure of \$31,109.09 to purchase traffic signal pre-emption equipment.

The pre-emption equipment allows firefighters responding to a call to change a traffic signal so the emergency vehicle has the green light.

Use of the equipment will hasten fire department response to fire and emergency service calls and will

provide enhanced safety for firefighters, according to Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

"I really believe our drivers and crews can get around faster if we can get a green light through an intersection," Chief Sebert said.

"I think this will save us considerable response time," he continued. "It will also increase the safety margin."

"The public will also be in less danger when we are running Code 3 (emergency)," offered the Rev. Irv Mitchell, fire board chairman.

Chief Sebert explained that motorists often get confused about how to respond to the flashing lights of an emergency vehicle, especially when they are already stopped at a red traffic signal.

"With the pre-emption device, we can change the light to green and the cars can advance and then pull off to the side of the road, allowing the fire truck to pass safely," Chief Sebert said.

Installation of the devices has been budgeted for three years but has been delayed because of county financial shortcomings. The county was to install the devices purchased by the fire department as it rebuilt intersection traffic signals.

With the installation of the devices, the fire department will be able to pre-empt all traffic lights in Sun City with the exception of those along Grand Avenue, and Bell Road at 98th and Lindgren avenues.

The fire department has had some type of control over the signal at the intersection of Bell Road and 99th Avenue for more than 20, according

to Chief Sebert. "It became automated about six years ago," he said.

Currently, only fire departments are using such devices in the Sun City area, Chief Sebert noted. Police departments and ambulances have not been using them.

"It is something we have been talking with the ambulance service about for several years," Chief Sebert said, adding it is not quite as critical for an ambulance to have the device as it is the fire truck.

"It is more critical for the first responder to arrive at the scene as quickly as possible rather than an ambulance," Chief Sebert explained.

The devices are something that should be readily available, so there will be not time awaiting delivery, according to Chief Sebert.

"Installation of the devices will coincide with the county's upgrading of intersections in Sun City," Chief Sebert said. He estimated the project will be completed in six to nine months.

DAILY NEWS-SUN WEDNESDAY, JULY 17, 2002

Fire district upgrades set at \$1.7M

SUN CITY: Loan needed for station renovation, radio improvements

JOHN SOKOLICH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City Fire District officials plan to borrow \$1.7 million to update radio equipment and renovate Station 132 at 99th Avenue and Sun City Boulevard.

Fire Chief Jim Sebert said the district hasn't decided whether it will go with a fixed or variable rate on the 10-year loan from National Bank of Arizona. Depending on the type of loan agreed upon, the fire district will pay back between \$51,000 and \$55,000 per quarter for the next 10 years. The loan amount, approved by the board Tuesday, is contingent on approval by the legal committee.

"We took everyone into consideration when we were doing this," said board member Jim Schmidt. "We were thinking about the taxpayers and the firefighters, and I think everyone will be happy with the results."

The largest chunk of the loan will be used to update communication towers, which will allow Sun City to join other fire departments in the Phoenix area transitioning to 800-megahertz frequencies for their radio equipment.

"The FCC is requiring all the departments to change to that frequency, and it's going to be an expense for us whether we run our own dispatch system or continue with the Phoenix system," Sebert said. "It's an unfortunate expense, but a necessary one."

In all, the Sun City Fire District will have to contribute just more than \$1 million to fund the project locally, which will update the dispatch system to the new frequency. The cost for each of the departments linked to the Phoenix system is based on the number of calls dispatched annually for each, rather than the number of square miles each department covers.

For example, the Sun City Fire Department, which covers less area than Surprise but gets more calls, will be paying just more than \$1 million, while Surprise will contribute \$406,000 to the project. The entire system is expected to cost \$75 million.

Sun City West will contribute about \$622,000 to the project.

Fire and police departments throughout the country are switching to the 800-megahertz frequency because of interference from other wireless users — such as cellular phones — and it's being more secure than lower frequencies, according to the FCC's Web site.

In addition to the funding for the frequency change, which is scheduled for implementation by 2004, the Sun City Fire Department is about to undertake a renovation project for Station 132, which was built in 1975.

The project is planned to

accommodate more firefighters, including separate areas for men and women, and to upgrade some of the facilities.

"The firefighters at that station consider it their second home," Schmidt said. "There is no reason that they should have to be kept cramped in those quarters. At this time, they are being treated like second-class citizens."

Schmidt said the fire board drafted plans that would cost \$700,000 or less to renovate the building. The first bid on the project came in at just less than \$1 million, he said, but was reworked to get it to \$700,000.

Board member Ed George, who worked on funding for both the renovation and radio-equipment projects, said he thinks the district should go ahead with the renovation plans because they are long overdue. He said the success of the project could eventually lead to renovations at the main

fire station at Bell Road and 99th Avenue sometime in the distant future. The project at Station 132 is expected to begin sometime in the next five weeks.

The major projects aside, the board also on Tuesday approved a smaller amount to further a fire-prevention program that has proven successful. The program includes going to residents' homes to assess fire-safety factors.

The program was made possible with a federal grant, according to Assistant Chief Steve Morrow. The grant purchased fire extinguishers and smoke alarms for homes that needed them.

"We are booked up for those inspections through October," Morrow said. "We cannot continue with them after that until we get some funding. It will take about \$5,000 to \$7,000 to get us through the rest of the year."

The board unanimously approved giving Morrow the additional funds.

John Sokolich can be reached at 876-2526 or jsokolich@aztrib.com.

SC Fire proposes budget increase

By Jeremy Pearlman
Independent Newspapers

Increases in personnel and equipment costs make up the primary chunks of a \$575,964 boost in expenses for the Sun City Fire District's proposed 2002-03 fiscal year budget in comparison to its previous budget.

If approved, the \$6,788,352 budget will include an additional \$369,964 in personnel costs over the 2001-02 budget. These funds will be dedicated toward increases in wages and to cover higher insurance costs for employees.

"I believe the biggest component in the changes in the overall budget is the personnel," said Fire Chief James A. Sebert.

"This year there were various proposals to adjust our pay scales, which are probably the biggest item within the personnel budget, of anywhere from 2 to 5 percent."

The proposed budget calls for a 3.5 percent cost of living increase for all fire district employees.

"It goes, quite honestly, a little ahead of inflation," Chief Sebert said.

"We have many Valley departments that are paying considerably higher wages than our department. We are down toward the bottom of the list and we are seeing these other departments not only hire additional firefighters but recruit firefighters from departments like ourselves."

Achieved performance is also factored into the hike in personnel costs.

"One thing I think the board was looking into while working toward this personnel budget was to reward those who are staying as best as we could to keep them here because it is a lot cheaper to keep the people working here than it is to train new ones and bring them on board," said Irvin S. Mitchell, Fire District Governing Board chairman.

In addition to wage increases, insurance costs are expected to

rise over the next fiscal year.

According to Chief Sebert, health insurance costs have jumped 13.5 percent annually for the past several years.

As a member of the Phoenix Radio Consortium – a bevy of fire departments who share resources to more effectively protect the public – the Fire District of Sun City is obligated to pay a portion of infrastructure costs toward a federally mandated upgrade to ultra-high frequency digital radio. The district will also need to pay for its own new equipment.

The ultra-high frequency digital radio is touted to improve compatibility across fire and law enforcement entities and provide increased signal penetration within buildings.

Infrastructure and equipment costs for this upgrade will continue for several budgets to come.

"The government is taking our bands and giving them over to commercial interests who have more influence, in my opinion, with Congress than we do and giving them the lower priced radio bands," said Mr.

Mitchell.

In total, the fire district will have to pay \$1.4 million dollars for infrastructure costs alone over the next 10 years.

The Federal Communications Commission mandates 100 percent compliance by Jan. 1, 2006.

The Fire District Governing Board is scheduled to vote on the proposed budget at its 9:30 a.m. June 25 meeting, to be held at the George Meade Fire Station, 17017 N. 99th Ave., in Sun City

Sun City Fire District to proceed with erecting security fence Firefighter safety top priority

By Mike Russo
Independent Newspapers

Sun City firefighters working on equipment or taking part in various drills in the parking lot behind the main fire station may soon feel a little safer.

The Sun City Fire District board of directors has agreed to have Arizona Fence and Security install an electrically controlled security fence on the property's southern boundary and barrier on the north side of the station to deter motorists from cutting through the property to avoid the traffic light at 99th Avenue and Bell Road.

"Arizona Fence and Security had agreed to do the project for just under \$15,000, including installing a barrier at the north end of the station," board member Jim Schmidt said.

The fire district board voted in January to expend up to \$20,000 to install a security gate on the south side of the fire station. However, it was hoping to save a substantial amount of money by having the Bell Metal Club fabricate and install the gate.

The club had expressed a

desire to assist the fire district. However, it decided the project was too big for it to undertake and decided not to do it, according to Mr. Schmidt.

The matter of the gate was brought before the board in January because Fire Chief Jim Sebert had noticed an increase in the number of vehicles that have been driving behind the main fire station.

"We have seen a definite increase in traffic cutting through, especially with the increased traffic on Bell Road," Chief Sebert said.

The fire department uses the property for drills and to perform maintenance on trucks and other equipment, and the motorists seeking a shortcut were posing an ever-greater safety risk.

Chief Sebert noted that he has seen people drive under the extended ladder truck while fire-

fighters were performing maintenance.

"People have been using our property for a shortcut," said the Rev. Irv Mitchell, board chairman. "We have had some near incidents."

"This should take care of one of our safety issues," said Ed George, vice chairman of the fire district's governing board.

"The security of our property and safety of our firefighters are of utmost concern," he continued.

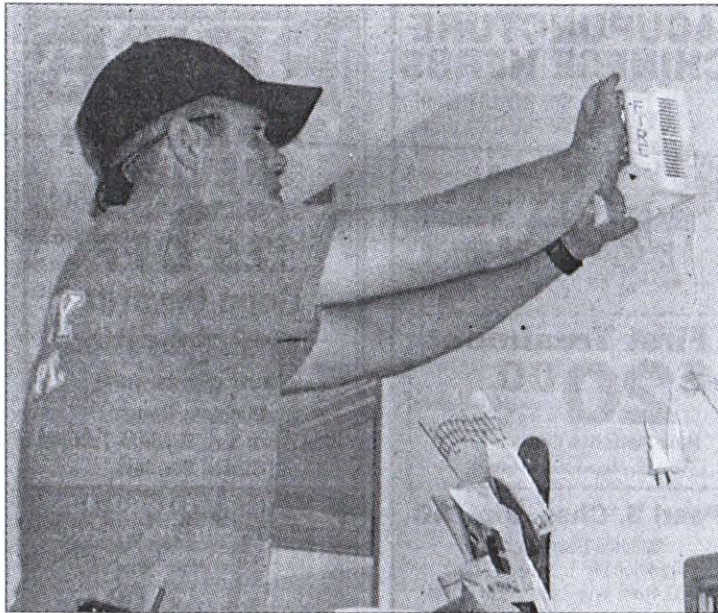
Mr. George noted that installation of the gate may yield an added benefit. "Our security will be improved, which may result in reduced insurance premiums," he said.

The fence will align with the wall of the neighboring APS substation, recessed about 100 feet off Bell Road.

Work is expected to start this week, Mr. Schmidt mentioned.

FEB. 13-19, 2002

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT



Sun City Fire District Support Services Technician Dan Carroll installs a smoke alarm for a hearing-impaired resident. These smoke alarms are twice as loud as a regular smoke alarm and they have strobe light that will wake someone while they are sleeping.

Sun City Fire District offers home safety survey

Smoke alarms are an important life-saving device because most fires occur between midnight and 8 a.m.

While you are sleeping, you are unable to smell, therefore you cannot rely on your nose to wake you in the event of a fire.

Those who are hearing impaired are unable to hear the alarm and, therefore, require some other stimulation of their senses to wake them. A new alarm rings twice as loud as the standard units and is also equipped with a strobe light to help rouse a hearing-impaired sleeper.

These special alarms are now available for installation by members of the Sun City Fire

Department after requesting a home safety survey.

A representative from the Sun City Fire Department will spend about a half-hour with the resident reviewing each room in the home for fire hazards and fall injury hazards.

Suggestions are made on how residents can make small changes in order to be better prepared in case of an emergency and how to avoid such situations in the first place.

For more information on home safety surveys or hearing impaired smoke alarms, contact Leslie Carroll, public education specialist with the Sun City Fire Department, 623-974-2321.

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT

JAN. 23-29, 2002

Sun Cities firefighters have busy year

Both departments respond to record number of calls in 2001

By Mike Russo
Independent Newspapers

Last year was an extremely busy one for the fire districts of Sun City and Sun City West.

In fact, both departments responded to a record number of calls during the year.

Sun City firefighters responded to a total of 10,247 calls in 2001, or an average of 28.35 per day, up from 9,600 in 2000. Of those calls, 8,042 involved responses in Sun City and 2,305 were in response to calls for

automatic/mutual aid.

In Sun City West, fire personnel were called out 4,416 times, or an average of 12.1 calls per day.

"That was up (8.63 percent) from the previous year when 4,065 calls were logged, said Deb Johnson, Sun City West Fire District community relations and public education specialist.

"It was a record year for calls in 2000," said Sun City Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

"We are averaging 28 calls

over each 24-hour period," said Ed George, vice chairman of the Sun City Fire District board of directors.

Medical assistance continues to make up the bulk of the calls in both communities.

Medical calls comprised 6,205, or 77.15 percent of the Sun City calls.

Cardiac calls amounted to 12.18 percent of the total, 980, and was the single greatest classification of medical calls.

Like Sun City, Sun City West's fire department was kept

most busy answering calls for medical assistance — 3,468, or 78.53 percent of the call volume.

Monday and Friday were the busiest days for both departments, with 1,250 responses being made on Monday and 1,124 on Friday in Sun City.

"We are not sure why, but that is the way it seems to be with doctors also," Chief Sebert said.

"A lot of people get sick over the weekend and they need to see a doctor when the offices open on Monday, and are told

there are no openings for a two weeks, so they call us," Chief Sebert said.

Ms. Johnson agreed with that assessment.

"As for Friday, some people are not feeling well and they don't want to be sick all weekend, so they call," Ms. Johnson added.

Calls by the other days of the week in Sun City were: Tuesday, 1,140; Wednesday, 1,130; Thursday, 1,101;

Saturday, 1,004; and Sunday, 1,113.

Sun City firefighters responded to 79 fire calls for the year, while their counterparts in Sun City West responded to 311.

Of the fire calls in Sun City, only nine were of a structural variety and 16 were vehicle fires.

With so many people maintaining winter residences in the Sun Cities, the winter months are the busiest for both fire departments.

"Our busiest month was December with 459 calls," Ms. Johnson said.

Fire district annexation proceeds

Citrus Point residents voice no opposition

By Matt Loeschman
Independent Newspapers

The Citrus Point subdivision may soon be annexed into the Sun City Fire District, maintaining the same services which have been provided on a contract basis since October 2000.

The fire district board voted unanimously Jan. 23 to move ahead with the annexation, which requires a certain number of residents' signatures on petitions which began circulating last weekend.

"We will be out on the weekend going door-to-door," said Sun City Fire Chief James Sebert. "This is a team effort to obtain the signatures that we need, but it is important that we get this done quickly."

For the annexation to occur, the fire district needs to collect signatures from more than one-half of the property owners representing more than one-half of the assessed property value and also one-half of qualified electors.

Homes in Citrus Point have been valued at \$2,860,550, according to the county assessor's office. Approximately \$800,000 of that estimated assessed valuation is for a strip of land owned by Salt River Project immediately east of Citrus Point.

The deadline for submitting the petitions to the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors is Feb. 15. Should that deadline be met, the subdivision would offi-

cially become part of the fire district on July 1, the beginning of the next fiscal year.

Chief Sebert began last Wednesday's special board meeting by explaining the impact statement, or "request for annexation," to the 20 Citrus Point residents in attendance.

The annexation will bring a change as to how residents pay for fire and emergency services. Currently, Pulte Homes collects a monthly fee used to pay for the fire department's contracted services. Once the annexation occurs, the contract fee will cease and residents will see an additional line on their tax bill.

The amount of taxes each resident will pay to the fire district is based on respective property values at a rate of \$2.0384 per \$100 of secondary property value. For example, a property valued at \$100,000 will pay an annual fire tax of \$203.84.

In addition, Pulte will pay a \$100,000 impact fee to join the fire district.

This fee will generate approximately \$60,000 in revenue for the district, which is the same amount of the existing contract.

These numbers are subject to change based on the fact that tax rates can fluctuate annually and

valuations are subject to change every two years.

Citrus Point is located on the south side of Bell Road across from the West Valley Art Museum and immediately west of Sun City. The community contains 331 homes.

Only two residents chose to speak at the meeting.

Carl Hahn said he was in favor of Citrus Point joining the fire district.

"I had a small emergency at my house," Mr. Hahn explained. "These men arrived very quickly, were very efficient and very friendly to me. They do a good job and I think we should be part of their district."

Scott Bradley, president of the Citrus Point Community Association, also voiced his approval.

"I think this is a good idea. I've talked to many residents who feel the same way," he said.

The fire department has responded to only seven calls in Citrus Point since beginning to provide emergency service. Services are provided from Sun City's main fire station, 131, located at Bell Road and 99th Avenue approximately 2.1 miles from the Citrus Point subdivision.

Daily News-Sun • Wednesday, Jan. 16, 2002

Fire districts answer record number of calls

SUN CITIES: Most responses occur on Mondays

JOHN SOKOLICH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

The Monday blues are more than a myth — at least in the Sun Cities.

The Sun City and Sun City West fire departments responded to more calls on that day of the week in 2001 than any other day.

Mondays in Sun City accounted for 1,250 calls, followed by Fridays with 1,214 calls. In Sun City West, Mondays also logged the highest number of calls, with 689 for the year.

"It's sort of one of those gee-whiz numbers," said Sun City Fire Chief Jim Sebert. "January also was the heaviest month of the year for responses."

January almost made the top spot in Sun City West as well. With 417 calls, January came in just behind December and March, which had 459 and 419 calls respectively.

"December was a busy month for us," said Deb Johnson of the Sun City West Fire Department. "And it seems like every year as the Northwest Valley grows, there are going to be more and more fire calls for the year."

Last year, the Sun City Fire Department responded to 8,042 calls within the community, including all fires and medical calls. In January alone, the department responded to 947 calls. Sun

City fire personnel also responded to 1,302 calls outside of Sun City as part of mutual and automatic aid.

Sun City West responded to 4,416 calls for 2001, more than 1,000 more calls than it did in 1999. Attributing to the number of calls is an increased number of mutual and automatic aid calls in the area.

Automatic aid allows for the closest rescue unit to a scene to respond to an emergency, which particularly helps communities with limited manpower or emergency vehicles.

All dispatch comes from Phoenix, and all emergency vehicles have global positioning systems that determine which is closest to an emergency call. Because of the central dispatcher, automatic aid does not require any additional work by emergency crews to dispatch trucks from other areas.

Between local responses and automatic aid calls, 2001 kept the community fire departments busy.

Last year "was a record year," Sebert said. "We were averaging about 22 calls a day."

Between the two communities, there were a total of six major fires that completely destroyed homes, but there were no fatalities for the calendar year. Those low numbers are attributed to fire education in the communities, according to Leslie Carroll of the Sun City Fire Department.

See Firefighters credit, A4

From A1

"What we are trying to do is target people in their homes," she said. "We spend about a half an hour with them and give them suggestions for what needs to be done. Residents seem very happy to have us come out to their homes and it allows people to see what the fire department is doing with their tax dollars."

Sun City Fire District board members reported Tuesday morning that since the terrorist attacks in New York and near Washington, D.C., on Sept. 11, fire departments have received more publicity than ever before, bringing fire safety awareness to the forefront of people's minds.

"I've seen the fire departments in this county when they were at their worst," said Paul Saunders, a board member. "There used to be a time when fire departments spent their time inside the station rather than coming out to meet the public. Now they are

out there and it is a lot better for the community to know who is protecting them."

Fire protection depends heavily on the visibility of the fire personnel in the community and the support that crews get from the community, Saunders said.

Jim Hegar, fire marshal for Sun City West, echoed those thoughts about fire protection and urged residents to be aware of the potential dangers in their homes.

The leading cause of house fires is electrical problems, according to data compiled by the Sun City Fire Department. Following closely behind is natural gas leaks and kitchen fires.

"I think if people are aware of the dangers in the home, then they are more likely to take the necessary precautions to protect their homes and themselves from fires," Hegar said.

John Sokolich can be reached at 876-2526 or jsokolich@aztrib.com.

Most-frequent fires in the Sun Cities for 2001:

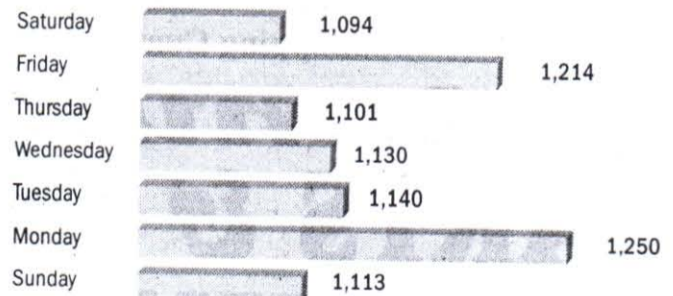
1. Vehicle
2. Electrical/wiring problems in home
3. Natural gas leaks
4. Kitchen
5. Dumpsters

Most-frequent medical calls in the Sun Cities for 2001:

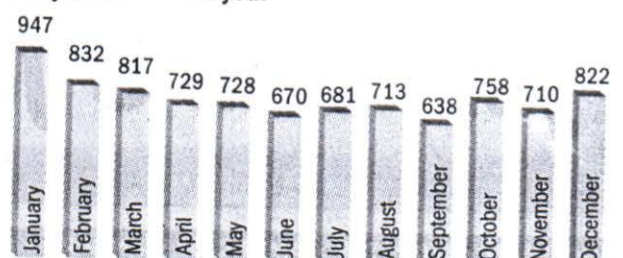
1. Heart problems
2. Fall injuries
3. Difficulty breathing
4. Invalid assistance
5. Abdominal pain

Sun City Fire District

Calls by day of the week



Calls by month of the year



SOURCE: Sun City Fire Department; Complete Sun City West data unavailable.

DAILY NEWS-SUN



PHOTOS BY STEVE CHERNEK/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City Firefighter Paul Burgess holds a smoke alarm that flashes a strobe, right, for hearing impaired people and emits a loud high-pitched tone.

Fire officials focus on safety

PROGRAM: Goal is to help residents make homes safer

JOHN SOKOLICH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

One resident died for every three major house fires in Sun City last year.

That statistic has local fire officials concerned and implementing a program to help residents make their homes safer. The overall number of house fires within the community remains relatively low — with fire-related injuries near rock bottom.

"We only had three major house fires in Sun City last year, but there was one fatality and three

injuries from them," said Leslie Carroll of the Sun City Fire Department. "The statistic would have been worse, still, if it wasn't for a bystander who went in a house to save someone. Those statistics don't sit well with me."

Sun City compiled the number of house fires from December 2000 to November 2001.

In Sun City West, the fire department also responded to three major house fires in the past year, but did not have any fatalities.

"We had three fires of any consequence last year," said Jim Hegar of the Sun City West Fire Department. "The residents of the community are very fire conscious about their homes, but we still get a lot of calls for minor fires."

Major house fires — or ones of significance — are defined as structure fires that cause a large amount of damage to a dwelling, usually spread throughout the house.

Although the number of major house fires is considerably lower in the area, having even one fatality causes concern for the communities' fire departments and has prompted an all-out push to inspect residents' homes. Also available now are fire alarm devices designed specifically for the hearing impaired.

"Education is key," said Hegar. "It's important for residents to take the time to practice fire safety."

Nationwide every year, 1,200 people older than 65 are killed in fires and another 3,000 are

injured, according to the National Fire Protection Agency. In addition, seniors between the ages of 65 and 75 have a fire-related death rate three times higher than the national average.

The reason the statistic is so high for seniors is related to the overall health of the age group.

"Some of them are on a lot of medication," Carroll said. "Some of them aren't very mobile anymore and some of them have problems hearing, which can lead them to not hear when a smoke detector comes on. We found with a lot of residents in the area that people don't change the batteries in their smoke detectors enough anyway."

OVER

See Free inspections, A5



DAILY NEWS-SUN FILE PHOTO

Firefighters work on a fatal fire that occurred in December 2000 at a home located in the 17000 block of North Country Club Drive in Sun City.

From A1

To improve the situation, the fire departments of Sun City and Sun City West are offering residents free home inspections, including suggestions to improve their safety in the event of a fire.

Residents can set up a home safety survey and a representative from the fire department will spend about an hour with them in their home. During this visit, the fire official will review each room to check for fire hazards. Also, tips will be recommended for better safety.

"All we can do is offer suggestions," Carroll said. "It's nothing we can enforce, but it is important and we would like everyone in Sun City to be as safe as possible and not become a statistic."

For the hearing impaired, the fire department is offering a smoke detector that has a strobe light as well as an ear-piercing alarm. The strobe light is made to wake up people who normally wouldn't be able to hear a fire alarm.

"When you are asleep, you can't smell," said Carroll. "So it's important for people to have these smoke detectors in the bedroom if they cannot hear well."

In addition, fire officials urge residents to have smoke detectors in every bedroom as well as halfway between their kitchen and living areas.

The ages of the homes in Sun City and Sun City West do not have any bearing on how fast fire will travel through the dwellings, Hegar said. Older homes, sometimes built with more concrete or brick than wood, sometimes don't have as many safety features as newer, mainly wood homes.

"Every year fire codes are updated," Hegar said. "Pretty much everything is learned by trial and error. We find out what worked and what didn't. Any homes that are built are required to meet the building and safety codes."

To set up a home inspection survey in Sun City, call Carroll at 974-2321. In Sun City West, call Hegar at 584-3500.

Fire district safety survey is ready

Goal is safety of residents

By Mike Russo
Independent Newspapers

A new tool has been developed to help the Sun City Fire District fulfill its mission to provide the highest level of life and property safety to residents.

"Our department is always developing new programs to educate and inform residents about fire safety and health issues,"



Carroll

Leslie Carroll, community relations specialist. "Our newest program — The Home Safety Survey — is now ready for distribution."

The new survey will allow fire district personnel to assess the safety level of Sun City residences.

Annually, 1,200 seniors over the age of 65 are killed in fires and another 3,000 are injured, according to Mrs. Carroll. "Seniors between the ages of 65 and 75 have a fire-related death rate three times higher than the national average," she said.

Additionally, one out of every three seniors over the age of 65 falls at least once a year, Mrs. Carroll noted. Injuries from falls are the leading cause of morbidity and mortality in seniors.

Residents can request inspec-

tions to determine potential hazards in their homes. The survey will also include safety tip sheets that will help people identify possible problems within their homes.

Citizens can request a survey by calling Mrs. Carroll at the fire department at 974-2321. There is no charge to have the survey performed.

She is currently conducting the surveys but firefighters will undergo training in January and will then perform some of the surveys.

Surveys are done during business hours Monday through Friday.

"We will give the residents an estimated time because crews cannot be sure when they can be at a house," Mrs. Carroll said. "They may be out on a call."

It takes an hour or less to conduct the survey, but the time spent could well result in a safer abode.

When conducting the survey, fire department personnel will examine both the exterior and interior of the home.

"We check to make sure fire hydrants are not blocked," Mrs. Carroll explained. "We check locks, test smoke detectors and show the residents how to change batteries and test the

“
My goal is to
provide safety
information and
reduce injuries from
both fire and falls, and
prevent fire-related
deaths.”

Leslie Carroll
SCFD Community Relations
Specialist

smoke detector.

"We look at heating and electrical system," she continued. "We look at how many appliances are plugged into an outlet.

"If they smoke, we make suggestions about ash trays and wetting ashes before throwing them into a larger container," Mrs. Carroll added.

Fires that result in the most deaths are smoking related, according to Mrs. Carroll. "That is why smoke detectors are so important," she said.

The kitchen is a point of emphasis because "most fires are started from cooking. The majority of the calls we respond

to in Sun City are stove or oven fires," Mrs. Carroll said.

"We check to see if there are things above the stove that might catch fire," she said.

Bathrooms are checked for grab bars and non-skid backing on rugs.

"In the bedroom we want to see if there is a phone near the bed to make sure they can call 911," Mrs. Carroll said.

Once the survey is completed, a copy is left with the residents. "We also leave them some fact sheets on general safety, fire safety and some simple tips on how they can correct a problem.

"It will provide them with valuable tips on how to avoid fall injuries, fires and tells them what to do in an emergency," Mrs. Carroll said.

"My goal is to provide safety information and reduce injuries from both fire and falls, and prevent fire-related deaths," she continued. "I want to give the residents the tools to protect themselves."

The fire department does not know how great the demand will be for the survey, but Mrs. Carroll said, "We would like to do a survey for everyone. We want to make sure that everyone in Sun City is as safe as possible."

Firefighters want blazing sales

SHOT FOR A CAUSE: Local heroes pose for fund-raising calendar

JEANNE WINOGRAD
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City firefighter Jennifer Johnston and Captain Jim West recently accepted a work assignment they never anticipated when training for risky ladder duty.

Following the deaths of almost 300 firefighters in New York on Sept. 11, Johnston and West helped decide which Sun City firefighters would be featured in a benefit photo calendar. The project is designed to raise money for wounded firefighters and families of those who die in the

line of duty, both here and in New York. The fund is called the Sun City Firefighters Memorial Fund.

"I've taken pictures of firefighters at work during the past two years," Johnston said. "Everybody was modest about participating, but were very supportive. We used some of my pictures for ideas."

The August photo for "Everyday Heroes, Sun City Firefighters 2002 Calendar" features Johnston and her 16-month-old son, Tyler. The back cover photo features an emblem on the 99th Avenue and Bell Road station kitchen table, where firefighters gather to relax between calls.

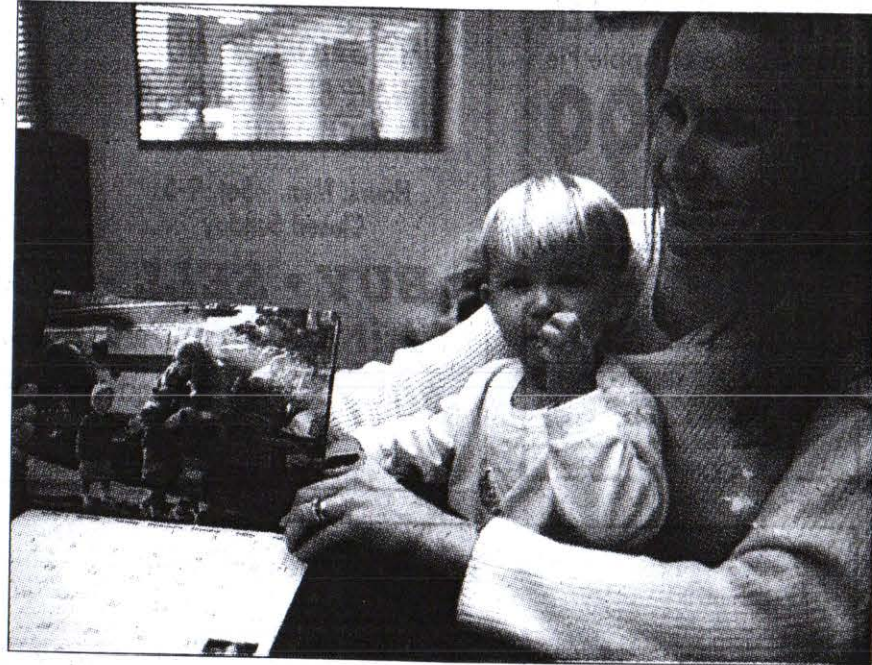
The September photo is an authentic picture of firefighters raising the flag at Ground Zero in New York, used with permission. Others are staged shots, with real action photos used as insets, taken by Johnston, Sun City Captain John

Deakin, and other firefighters who enjoy photography.

"The idea for a calendar came up in discussion at The Woodmark as something totally different," said Linda Vigil, marketing director for the assisted living facility in Sun City, which produced the calendar at no cost to the Sun City Fire Department.

With a touch of prescience, Vigil and a co-worker, Robin Burr, had their first meeting about the calendar last summer with Sun City Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

"In August, I thought it was a good way of communicating with the public about services we provide, for people to see the scope of our equipment and personnel," Sebert said. "On the afternoon of Sept. 11, the focus of the project changed, giving more emphasis on



JOY LAMBERT/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City firefighter Jennifer Johnston and her son, Tyler, 18 months, posed for the May photo of the "Everyday Heroes, Sun City Firefighters 2002 Calendar." Their photo was picked for May in conjunction with Mother's Day.

See Firefighters pose, A7

From A1

firefighters and the different services we provide."

West is featured in the March shot with his dog, Aristotle.

"The dog is Mr. March," West said, laughing.

The calendar provides explanations of services such as fire prevention, smoke detector installations, CPR training, blood-pressure screenings, removal of snakes and other pests, and flu shot clinics.

For Sun City's three fire stations, cardiac arrest calls are the most prevalent.

"People don't call us because they're having a good day. Usually, it's because something's not right in their life," Sebert said. "We minimize water damage. We do any kind of animal control, even remove birds from exhaust-fan pipes."

Sebert said proceeds from calendar sales will help employees cover incidentals that go beyond the scope of benefit programs, such as travel costs for relatives

needing to attend a firefighter's funeral.

Benefit plans for firefighting-related health problems weren't available to Arizona firefighters as recently 11 years ago. Surprise Mayor Joan Shafer, who was married to a firefighter who died from lung cancer, led the fight for those benefits.

"The firefighter service doesn't understand the true impact of what Joan Shafer did for us," Sebert said. "She got us health insurance for cancer and communicable

diseases we face in the line of duty."

Since Sept. 11, the daily kiss goodbye has gained more significance for firefighters and their families, Sebert said.

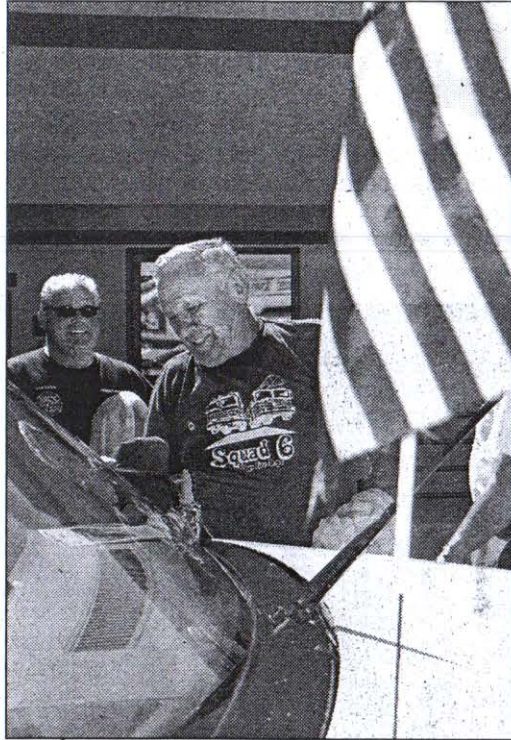
Johnston said, "It makes family more important, reminding people it can happen to anyone."

To order the calendars, which cost \$12 each or two for \$22, call 583-7600 and ask for Linda Vigil.

Jeanne Winograd can be reached at jwinograd@aztrib.com or by calling 876-2532.

Daily News-Sun • Monday, Oct. 15, 2001

Carwash receives waves of support



JOY LAMBERT/DAILY NEWS-SUN

Bill Bielawski, a retired Chicago firefighter, dries off a car that had a flag on its antenna, at the benefit carwash held at Sun City Fire Station 131 Saturday. Cars were lined up for hours, and there was a anonymous \$500 donation.

JOHN SOKOLICH
DAILY NEWS-SUN

A former New York City fire captain, Jerry Maliva of Sun City still feels the sting of losing some of his co-workers in a fire 35 years ago.

In that fire, he lost four men from his company. Saturday, he said he cannot even comprehend the tragedy of how many firefighters were lost in the terrorist attacks Sept. 11.

To help the families of the fallen firefighters, the Sun City Fire Department held a benefit carwash at station 131 with a lot of support from the community.

"I think it's great what they are doing for their fallen brothers and sisters in New York," Maliva said while watching dozens of cars being washed at the station. "There were 20 funerals in one day in New York. I can sympathize, but I can't really explain the feeling."

Opening two bays at Fire Station 131, the fire house was turned into a drive-through carwash Saturday.

"We got about 40 guys from off-duty to help at the carwash out of about 60," said Capt. John Deakin of the Sun City Fire

Department. "That's almost 100 percent of our department. We can't even get that many to come out and get a beer together usually."

Saturday marked the first time the Sun City department held such a carwash, but it was a success even before it started.

Scheduled to begin at 9 a.m., Deakin said there were cars lined up around the block for the wash at 6:45 a.m.

"We had a couple come by and drop off \$200 checks and then tell us that they didn't need their car washed," he said. "There is a lot of support from the community on this."

The largest donation of the day came from a Sun City resident asking to remain anonymous. It was a check for \$500.

"The public is really excited about this," Deakin said. "I think a lot of them wanted to show their support but didn't know what to do. This gave them an opportunity to donate."

Firefighter Justin Bradowich said some of the biggest support came from other businesses in the area donating supplies and food.

Among the sponsors were

Krispy Kreme donuts, Mobile, Coca-Cola, Frito Lay, Eagle One Products and Mission Linens.

"There's just an overwhelming amount of support out there for this," Bradowich said. "The community really showed us how much they support us and the victims in New York."

Firefighter Paul Burgess said he was hoping to raise \$10,000 for the fund, which will be turned over to the International Association of Firefighters for the New York 9-11 Relief Fund. All proceeds will go to aid the families of fallen firefighters of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Last month, the Sun City West Fire Department sponsored a carwash fund-raiser and collected close to \$5,000. The goal was doubled for this Saturday's wash.

The Sun City department came close to doubling the amount raising more than \$7,300 as of this morning. Donations were still trickling in, according to fire officials, so an exact amount will not be known for a while.

"It wasn't just us that raised the money, though, it was the community as a whole," Deakin said. "We want them to know that we really appreciate it a lot."

SUN CITY FIRE DISTRICT GETS GRANT

Funds will be used for educational programs

By MIKE RUSSO
Independent Newspapers

The Sun City Fire District is among four Arizona fire departments, thus far, to receive a grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency under a program authorized last year by Congress.

The \$78,840 grant will be used for educational programs, according to Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

The federal government has made \$100 million available to fire departments through FEMA. More than 19,700 fire department nationwide applied for grants, submitting requests totaling \$2.98 billion.

Chief Sebert was delighted to receive the notification last week.

"We are very excited that we are going to get some federal monies to supplement our funds to educate our population," Chief Sebert said.

"This will allow us to hire a full-

time person to do educational programs," he continued. "That persons will speak to the community's organizations informing them of ways to reduce their risk for fire as well as improving their chances of surviving a fire."

The fire district also submitted a \$120,000 grant request for fire-fighter fitness development. No decision has been made on that request yet.

Chief Sebert praised the efforts of Steve Morrow, assistant fire chief, and Tim Van Scoter, battalion chief, in preparing the grant applications.

Mr. Morrow said one the factors likely weighing in Sun City's favor is the age of its residents.

"Sun City is considered a target community because of the age of its residents," he explained. "Residents are at a much greater risk for injury from falls and other mishaps."

Advanced age and a reduction in mobility has also been responsible for a higher than normal fire-related mortality rate in Sun City.

"We have a mortality rate that is 400 percent higher than a standard community," Mr. Morrow said.

"Seven of the last 10 fire-related fatalities in Sun City were people with disabilities. The other three were caretakers," he added.

Grant funds will allow the fire department to do some things to reduce fire fatalities.

"The grant will allow us to do some modifications in some homes, such as installing wheelchair ramps and smoke detectors, which will help save lives," Mr. Morrow said.

"We may even be able to secure special smoke detectors for people who are hearing-impaired," he continued.

Mr. Morrow said the fire district's goal is to reduce residential fire risks to a level approximating that of the community's commercial properties.

"Sun City's fire loss from a commercial standpoint is very low," Mr. Morrow said. "That is the result of our volunteers going out to the businesses every six months, but we don't have a home program."

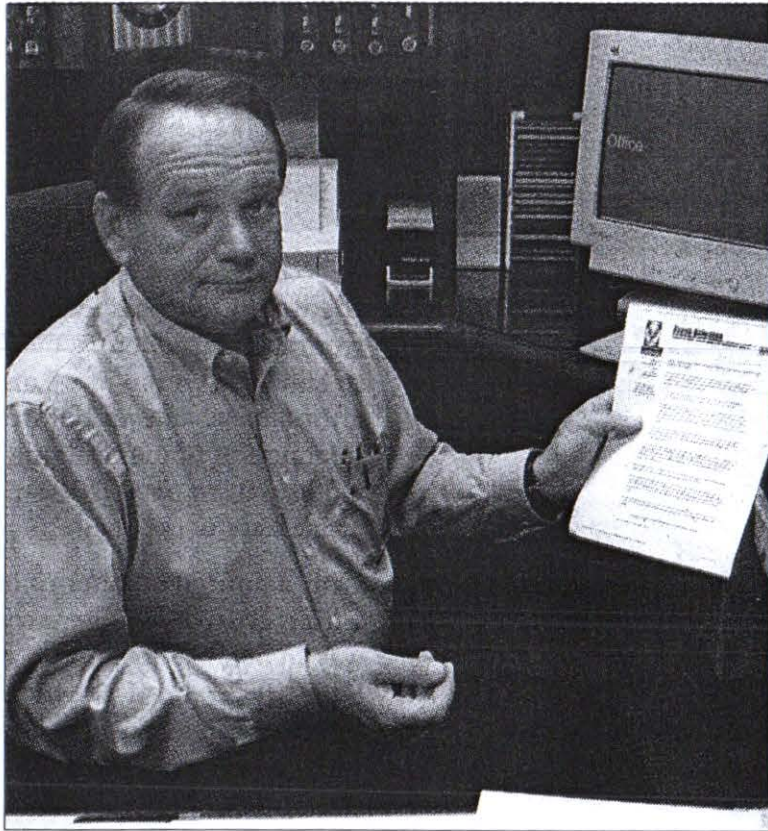


Photo by MIKE RUSSO/Independent Newspapers

Steve Morrow, Sun City Fire District assistant fire chief, peruses the notification that the fire department has received a \$78,240 federal grant for educational programs.

Fire districts enter into mutual agreement

Pact expected to save money

By **MIKE RUSSO**
Independent Newspapers

A bond between the fire departments of the Sun Cities, forged during a joint recruiting program earlier this spring, has gotten even stronger.

The two departments have approved an intergovernmental agreement that will allow each department to draw from the other's manpower to meet emergency personnel needs.

Sun City Fire Chief Jim Sebert explained that the IGA would result in a saving for the fire department.

"Sun City West Fire Chief Bob Biscoe and I compared notes and there were times ... that we get to a point where, in essence, we run out of manpower," Chief Sebert said.

Whether through vacations, sick-

days or short staffing, there are occasions during the year that the fire district has to call in an employee to cover a shift, Chief Sebert explained.

"Rather than calling back in a battalion chief at his salary, we could use a Sun City West firefighter to fill in for one of our firefighters," explained Chief Sebert.

"We would have had an opportunity to use this arrangement four or five times last year," the chief said. "This will open the door for more opportunities than four or five."

The pay scales of both departments are similar in a range, according to Chief Jim Sebert. "So, we will know our financial obligation (when using Sun City West personnel)," Chief Sebert said.

See ■ PACT, Page 9

Bills for payroll expenditures would be exchanged at the end of each month.

"There really is no net cost to either department to do this," Chief Sebert remarked. "This has the potential to save us money."

Sun City West Fire Chief Bob Biscoe wholeheartedly supported the IGA.

"This will provide a great help in some of our scheduling difficul-

ties," Chief Biscoe said. "It is difficult to staff sometimes.

"The IGA will be used to deepen our personnel pool as backup and it will truly help us on occasion," he continued.

"I think we are going to start working more closely with our neighbors and this is a step in the right direction," said Treasurer Tom Stroozas.

"This is an example of how inno-

vative our department has become," observed Ed George, Sun City Fire District board member.

In April, the two departments combined with the city of Surprise to hold a joint recruitment to establish a candidate list for future department openings.

The joint recruitment drew more than 500 applicants and was characterized as a huge success by Chief Sebert.

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT JUNE 27-JULY 3, 2001

Sun City Fire District OKs \$6.2 million budget

Property tax expected to rise about 2 percent

By **MIKE RUSSO**
Independent Newspapers

The Sun City Fire District board of directors June 19 unanimously approved a \$6,212,388, budget for fiscal 2001-02, which begins July 1. The budget is up \$503,214 from

last year's \$5,709,174, or an 8.8 percent increase.

"Although it is an 8 percent increase, the tax rate will go up an estimated 2 percent, based on the tax rate which will be set by the county in August" said the Rev. Irv Mitchell, board chairman. "Holding the tax increase to 2 percent is doing pretty well."

The tax rate is expected to rise from its present \$1.9956 per \$100 of assessed valuation to approximately \$2.03, according to Rev. Mitchell.

Rising fuel costs and increased salaries and benefits necessary to retain experienced personnel are the major factors contributing to the budget hike, according to Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

In establishing the budget, the board awarded the firefighters a 4 percent cost of living increase, with associated benefits, which bumped the personnel cost to \$5,022,788. That is up from \$4,627,574 last year.

The Sun City Fire District has been having a difficult time retaining experienced personnel, according to Rev. Mitchell. Neighboring communities are offering higher starting wages to firefighters.

Rising costs of health insurance also contributed to the increased personnel costs.

Escalating prices for unleaded and diesel fuel hiked the budget by \$45,000, from \$105,000 to \$150,000.

Through the first 10 months of

the current fiscal year the district had already expended \$108,000 on fuel.

For the first time in more than a dozen years the fire district will not be receiving a fee from the town of Youngtown as the result of a contract to provide fire and emergency services to the town. That is because Youngtown will be annexed into the fire district as of July 1 and as a result the town's residents will pay for the services through their county property tax bill.

The fire district received roughly \$280,000 from Youngtown during the current fiscal year.

Youngtown's 1,500 parcels were valued last year at approximately \$15,000,000 to \$16,000,000,

according to information provided by the Maricopa County Assessor's Office.

Chief Sebert believes the new arrangement will be advantageous to the fire district.

"Youngtown entering the fire district will add increased ad valorem (property) tax to the revenue base," Chief Sebert said.

Board Treasurer Tom Stroozas said the board agonized and put in long hours preparing the budget.

"We have done the best we can," added board member Jim Schmidt.

The budget will now be submitted to the county supervisor and treasurer by July 10, according to Brayton Willis Sr.

Fire budgets increasing in Sun Cities

By Brent Whiting
The Arizona Republic

The cost of fire protection in Sun City is going up.

On Tuesday, the five-member Sun City Fire District board adopted a budget of slightly more than \$6.2 million, a \$500,000 increase from the current operating budget.

Board members, including Tom Stroozas, said they worked hard in evaluating community needs and compiling a responsible budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1.

The budget hike — which comes to nearly 9 percent — is in line with an increase in Sun City West.

On Friday, the Fire District of Sun City West is expected to adopt a proposed budget of nearly \$5.5 million, an increase of \$450,000 from the

current budget.

In both retirement communities, the increases are the result, among other things, of cost-of-living raises, higher fuel prices and mounting expenses for workers' medical coverage, officials said.

In an expected cost-saving move, both districts this month adopted an agreement that allows for an exchange of firefighters to fill job shifts.

If one district has a need for help due to sickness, vacation or other problems, it can fill a shift with an available firefighter from the other district.

Robert Biscoe, the Sun City West fire chief, said cooperative agreements are in the best interest of both agencies.

Reach the reporter at
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(602) 444-6925.

PUMP UP THE VOLUME

Sun City Fire Department receives new fire truck

By **MIKE RUSSO**
Independent Newspapers

The Sun City Fire Department has taken delivery of a piece of apparatus that will improve its fire-fighting efficiency while also potentially reducing losses by fire victims.

A new state-of-the-art pumper will allow the department to fight fires with a new compressed air foam system, which smothers the fire faster and causes less damage to personal property than does water.

"It allows us to put a blanket of foam over the fire," explained Fire Chief Jim Sebert. "It cooks the fire and smothers it, preventing oxygen from feeding the fire."

The foam system was developed to battle forest fires, according to

Chief Sebert.

"We are very anxious to get it into service, especially to use the compressed air foam system," Chief Sebert said.

Chief Sebert said the foam causes less damage than water because once it dries it can be easily wiped off. It does not soak into the property. The coverage area is similar to water.

A crew from Sun City traveled to Appleton, Wis., in late May to accept delivery of the \$365,000 pumper truck, manufactured by Pierce Manufacturing. The truck has an expected life of 15 years.

The district made a \$207,846.33 down payment and received a \$35,000 trade-in for its previous pumper.

"We are getting significantly more on trade-in than any other

pumper we have ever traded in," Chief Sebert said. "The best we ever got before was about \$20,000."

The remainder of the purchase price will be financed at a rate of 5.64 percent. Funds for the down payment came from the district's capital projects budget. The truck will be paid off in four payments over three years and one month, according to Chief Sebert.

Battalion chiefs Ron Gilbride, who also serves as the department's fleet manager, and Ken Swick and two other fire department personnel made the journey to Appleton.

"They went to the factory with a set of specifications 60 pages long to make sure the truck was manufactured to those specifications,"

Chief Sebert explained.

"A couple of drivers were contracted (by the local Pierce Manufacturing) to drive the vehicle back to Sun City," continued.

The trek back from Appleton to Sun City served as a shakedown trip and it "served as a nice review for some of our people," according to Chief Sebert.

The truck's mechanical performance on the return trip was excellent, Chief Sebert noted. "The truck ran well and it served as a good break-in for the engine," Chief Sebert said.

The new truck will pump water at a rate of 1,500 gallons per minute, the same as the previous pumper.

That flow is more than adequate for residential fires and is sufficient to handle commercial properties in Sun City, according to Chief Sebert.

One of the major issues facing the department over the years has been compartment space. This truck has significantly more compartment space, especially useful for storing medical equipment.

The truck is capable for carrying eight people "but we typically would have four or, on occasion, five," Chief Sebert said.

The communication system and other electronics were installed last week.

Chief Sebert was optimistic that the new pumper could be placed into service by June 19.

No more major fire apparatus purchases are planned for three or four years, according to Chief Sebert. "We try to spread out the expense," he said.



Photo by JEREMY PEARLMAN/Independent Newspapers

The Sun City Fire Department has taken delivery of a new pumper truck manufactured by Pierce Manufacturing in Appleton, Wisc., that will allow the department to fight fires more efficiently. The truck is equipped with state-of-the-art foam suppression system.

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT FEBRUARY 7-13, 2001

Sun City Fire Department gets 'shocking' new equipment

By JULI NESSETT
Independent Newspapers

The Sun City Fire Department recently received some new "shocking" equipment, which should make local residents with heart problems feel at ease.

In mid-October the department received a shipment of six new electrocardiogram/defibrillators.

Cost of the defibrillators was \$60,000, paid for through the department's capital projects fund.

The new equipment replaced six similar machines that were up to 12 years old.

Because the department had used this type of equipment in the past, personnel did not really have to be trained.

"We just gave them in-service

training because of the different placement of controls and things like that," said Battalion Chief Ken Swick.

The new equipment features many upgrades, like an oxygen saturation monitor, which is used to check if the patient is getting enough oxygen in their circulation. A pacemaker is also part of the system.

Although defibrillators in the past utilized paddles to deliver the shock, the new equipment features electrodes, which are attached directly to the patient.

According to Mr. Swick, the equipment is now interchangeable with both Del E. Webb and Boswell Memorial hospital's equipment.

"Which is especially important with someone using the pacemaker.

You don't want to stop that even for a second," he said.

The department is also able to leave the machines at the hospital, making for even more efficient treatment.

Although the acquisition of the new equipment was costly, Mr. Swick says cost is not important when it comes to more efficient patient care.

"To put it as simply as you can, pretty much everybody knows your brain starts to die in four minutes. I mean who can get to the hospital in four minutes. That's the whole reason pre-hospital care exists," he added.

The Sun City Fire Department receives approximately 600 emergency medical calls a month, 200 of which are cardiac related.

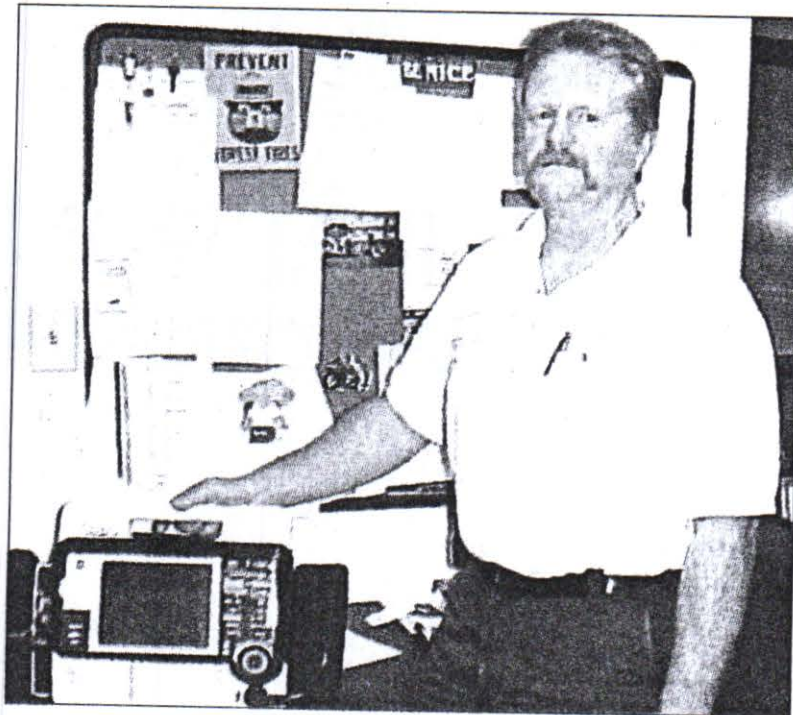


Photo by JULI NESSETT/Independent Newspapers
Sun City Fire Department Battalion Chief Ken Swick poses for a shot with one of the six electrocardiogram/defibrillators the department recently acquired.

Sun City Fire District begins providing service to Citrus Point

Contract is similar to the one between Youngtown, district

By **MIKE RUSSO** 6-2000
Independent Newspapers

The Sun City Fire District has begun providing fire and emergency medical services for the residents of Citrus Point, a subdivision located on the south side of Bell Road, across from the West Valley Art Museum and immediately west of Sun City.

The eventual 332-home subdivision is being developed by Pulte Homes. Approximately 147 houses have been completed or are in various stages of construction.

The contract with the Citrus Point Community Association is expected

to generate about \$22,000 to \$23,000 in revenues this year, and about \$60,000 annually at build out, according to Sun City Fire Chief Jim Sebert. No additional expenses will be incurred by the fire district to provide the service, the chief noted.

"They had approached the city of Surprise and Rural/Metro ... and they approached us," explained Sun City Fire Chief Jim Sebert. The sticking point with Rural/Metro was the 10-mile distance to its closest station, located in the area of Peoria Avenue and Litchfield Road.

The Sun City Fire Department will furnish services from the main fire station located at 99th Avenue

and Bell Road, which is two miles from the entrance to the Citrus Point Community.

The contract has been signed by the Citrus Point Community Association and the fire district has billed the association for October and November service, Chief Sebert noted.

"Pulte starts paying (for protection) for lots under construction when combustible materials (limber) are brought onto the site," Chief Sebert said.

Fees imposed on each house are added to the mortgage payments.

See ■ FIRE DISTRICT, Page 5

"As long as they are paying for their houses, the money will be coming into the Community Association and we will get our money," the chief said,

Fees are based upon the residence's selling price, according to Chief Sebert, and are assessed at the fire district's current rate — \$1.9956 per \$100 of assessed valuation.

Homes in the subdivision range in size from 1,000 to 1,500 square feet, according to Chief Sebert.

The contract with Citrus Point runs through June 30, 2001, and is similar to agreements that have provided fire and EMS service to Youngtown. The fire district also provides services to Sun City RV Storage, located next to Citrus Point.

Chief Sebert views the contract as an economic boon to the fire dis-

trict.

"There are few opportunities for the fire district to expand its revenue base with Sun City being built out, and serving Citrus Point is one in which to generate additional income," Chief Sebert said.

He noted the district has lost the bulk of the tax base provided by the Recreation Centers of Sun City facilities as the result of recent legislation. The district's expenditures are therefore spread among the community's residents, contributing to higher tax bills for Sun Citians.

Billing will be handled by the Citrus Point Community Association.

Once 85 percent of the subdivision's homes are sold, a homeowners association can be formed and that HOA can apply for annexation into the fire district.



Photo by MIKE RUSSO/Independent Newspapers

Brayton Willis Sr., seated, clerk of the Sun City Fire District board of directors, signs the order annexing Youngtown into the fire district as, from left, the Rev. Irv Mitchell, board president; Gene Russell Youngtown mayor; Jim Sebert, fire chief, observe.

Youngtown annexed into Sun City Fire District

Change will take effect July 1, 2001

By MIKE RUSSO
Independent Newspapers

A nearly year-long attempt to have Youngtown annexed into the Sun City Fire District has resulted in success.

The fire district board of directors, last week approved the annexation after receiving official confirmation from the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors that the town met all three criteria for annexation.

Youngtown will be officially accepted into the fire district, and be

entered onto the county tax roll, on July 1, 2001. The county will then assume the burden of collecting taxes to offset the cost of the fire service.

A letter from Norma Risch, deputy clerk of the Board of Supervisors, indicated Youngtown's petitions contained signatures from more than one-half of the town's property owners — 904 of 1,602 property owners, or 56.42 percent; the total assessed value represented by signatories exceeded 50 percent — \$6,617,788 out of \$12,817,539

assessed value, or 51.6 percent; and the signatories represented more than one-half of the town's qualified electors — 908 qualified electors out of 1,610 signers for verification, or 56.4 percent.

"This has been an all-out effort, not only by residents, but the elected people of Youngtown," said Mayor Gene Russell, who spearheaded the annexation movement.

He thanked the fire district officials and the firefighters, who

See ■ ANNEXATION, Page 3

helped circulate petitions.

"This was a team effort that brought forth a good result," he said.

"We sincerely appreciate not only the concerns, but the help of the fire district officials," Mayor Russell continued. "This has made a great impact, not only on the elected officials, but the residents of Youngtown."

Fire Chief Jim Sebert mentioned the fire district has provided fire and emergency service to Youngtown on a contractual basis for the last 14 years.

"The level of service will not change one bit," he said. "This is just a continuation of our daily routine changing only in the manner it is financed."

Under the present contract, residential and commercial property owners pay the same rate of assessment, .00262 cents times the full cash value of the property. The town is responsible for collecting the fire fee.

Once the town joins the fire district, taxes will be assessed by the county. Residential and commercial properties are taxed at a different rate, based on the secondary valuation.

A secondary valuation is an assessment of the full cash value at

Annexation should not adversely affect Sun City

By MIKE RUSSO

Independent Newspapers

Youngtown's annexation into the Sun City Fire District will not adversely affect Sun City residents, according to Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

In fact, it may actually result in a slight reduction in the tax rate paid by Sun City residents.

Youngtown adds an assessed value of \$12,817,539 to the fire district's present \$245 million assessment.

Including Youngtown in the district will not require the addition of any new stations, personnel or equipment, Chief Sebert noted. That will allow the new, higher assessment to be divided among the property owners, without incurring significant expenses, thereby possibly reducing the individual tax liabilities.

"We tried to look down the

10 percent for residential property and 25 percent for commercial property.

road and make a decision that was good for Sun City," Chief Sebert said. "Sun City's residents were our primary concern. It had to be good for them.

"Sun City is landlocked; it cannot grow," he mentioned. That meant the assessment base was unable to grow, unless the annexation occurred. "The addition of Youngtown will provide a greater tax base," Chief Sebert added.

Additionally, adding Youngtown to the fire district provides stabilization for budgeting purposes. "We can now count on their assessment every year," the chief noted. Under the existing contractual arrangement, Youngtown could cancel the service, leaving the fire district looking for alternative funding sources.

"I think it is a good long-range planning now that this take place," Chief Sebert concluded.

Until Youngtown is annexed, it will continue to contract for service with the fire district. The town has

negotiated a \$280,516.08 contract with the fire district for fire and emergency service for 2000-2001. That is up from the current year's \$233,821.08.

Official notification from the county of the annexation attempt's success reversed a setback earlier this year for the town.

Mayor Russell presented 166 petition pages, bearing the signatures of 1,088 property owners and 1,321 electors, to the fire district board on Jan. 4.

However, signers of the petitions did not represent more than one-half of the town's assessed valuation at the time, \$12,817,539. Signatures on the petitions submitted represented \$6,252,498.

With the petitions remaining valid until June 30, Mayor Russell went back to work gathering signatures and the effort resulted in the collection of signatures representing nearly \$450,000 in valuation, putting the town over the top.

Brayton Willis Sr., clerk of the fire district board, pointed out that Youngtown residents will be eligible to seek election to the fire district board in 2002.

Youngtown Councilman Ben Biery praised Mayor Russell for his diligence and perseverance in achieving the annexation.

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT—MAY 3-9, 2000

Tax refund helps RCSC, hinders Sun City Fire District

By MIKE RUSSO
Independent Newspapers

One Sun City organization recently reaped an economic windfall while another suffered a financial setback as the result of a tax refund issued by Maricopa County.

The Recreation Centers of Sun City, Inc. won a three-year battle with the Maricopa County Assessor's Office and was awarded a refund of \$76,300 plus \$8,000 for tax years 1997, '98 and '99.

That refund resulted in \$12,371.78 in funding being withheld by the county to the Sun City Fire District. That was the fire district's share of the excess tax levied on the RCSC.

"We paid our property taxes

under protest for those three years," explained Harold Boudrie, RCSC treasurer. "We felt our properties were assessed too high." The county finally agreed.

"We have been fighting this for quiet awhile," said a pleased Mr. Boudrie.

However, it is not the loss of funding this year that has the fire district board of directors worried as the potential for reduced funding provided by RCSC taxes.

A state law passed last year provides a hefty property tax break for recreation centers in communities such as Sun City.

The legislation, which became effective Aug. 6, and is intended to provide relief for so-called "residential common areas" — typically buildings and facilities owned and

maintained by non-profit homeowners and condominium owners associations. It excludes golf courses, however.

Starting with tax year 2000, the value of each parcel will be set at a flat rate of \$500, as opposed to tax rates based on the full cash value of each parcel.

In Sun City, which has eight parcels belonging to the recreation centers, taxes are expected to fall from the current \$158,583 to only \$4,000.

The Recreation Centers reduced assessed valuation will have to be made up by the other property owners within the Sun City Fire District, according to Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

Fire district officials are not yet certain how the new legislation will

affect the district.

"They have not identified the parcels yet," said the Rev. Irvin Mitchell, SCFD board chairman.

"We have a rough assessed valuation to work with of \$251,000,000 up from \$243,000,000 last year," he said as the fire district prepares its budget for fiscal 2000-2001.

"What this will do to assessed values is difficult to say," remarked Chief Sebert.

Chief Sebert is concerned about the double-whammy likely to be faced by Sun City residents — increased fire district taxes due to the lowering of the rec centers' valuation and normal inflationary factors that have led to annual increases in recent years.

"That will not sit well with homeowners out here," Chief Sebert.

Youngtown formally applies for fire district annexation

Petitions now must be verified by county

By MIKE RUSSO
Independent Newspapers

More than a year of planning and work, including countless hours and innumerable doors knocked upon, yielded a satisfying result for Youngtown Mayor Gene Russell.

Mayor Russell, the chief proponent of Youngtown's annexation into the Sun City Fire District, presented 166 petition pages, bearing the signatures of 1,088 property owners and 1,321 electors, to Fire Chief Jim Sebert Jan. 4.

"In Youngtown only about one-third of valuation is from residential properties," Chief Sebert remarked. Conversely, in Sun City, residential properties account for about 80 percent of the valuation, he noted.

"I feel we are going to make it," the mayor said, adding, "The county will tell us what the correct information is."

Chief Sebert was also optimistic that the effort will prove successful.

"I really feel good about it," he said. "I think we are going to get a favorable word from the county."

The chief mentioned that judging by the appearance of the hefty stack of petitions "... everyone in Youngtown had an opportunity to make a decision.

"It looks a lot like the people of Youngtown have spoken," he added.

The petitions will now go to the Maricopa County Board of Supervisors for verification. The county Elections Department and Assessor's Office will also be involved in the process, according to Chief Sebert.

"The board of supervisors must validate the petitions to clear the way for the fire district board to annex Youngtown," Chief Sebert noted.

The chief said he is optimistic that the process can be completed by the end of the month.

If petition circulators are successful, Youngtown will go on the county tax roll on July 1.

In the interim, fire and emergency medical service will be provided for the town by the Sun City Fire District through an existing contract.

"Fire fee bills will go out within two weeks to cover the final six months (of the contract)," said Lloyce Robinson, town clerk/treasurer.

The existing contract is \$233,821.08, so, approximately \$116,910 will have to be billed.

In order for the annexation/boundary change to be finalized, the petitions must be signed by more than one-half of the town's property owners, representing more than one-half of the assessed property value and by more than one-half of the qualified electors.

Mayor Russell said he was confident that all criteria would successfully be met. However, he did express some trepidation about the total assessed property valuation since commercial property owners

had been less supportive of the attempt than residential property owners.

"We have the number of signatures of homeowners and electors. The only question is valuation," Mayor Russell said.

There are approximately 1,600 parcels in Youngtown, including commercial properties, and the community's total assessed valuation is about \$14 million, according to Mayor Russell.

See ■ FIRE DISTRICT, Page 9

Youngtown amounts to 6 to 7 percent of the fire district revenues, according to Chief Sebert.

Mayor Russell has been the leading advocate of Youngtown's annexation into the fire district, which has been providing fire and emergency medical service for the town for more than 10 years on a contractual basis.

A move into the Sun City Fire District would result in a lower cost for fire and EMS protection for residential property owners, while resulting in a higher cost for commercial property owners. That is why the commercial property owners have balked.

The town could also realize savings through the annexation. Under the present contract, it costs Youngtown approximately \$17,000 to administer the fire fee, the cost of which is passed on to the property owners.

Under the present contract, residential and commercial property

owners pay the town the same rate of assessment, .00262 cents times the full cash value of the property.

Thus, the owner of a \$100,000 residence pays a fee of \$262. That could be lowered to \$178.66 if the town was part of the Sun City Fire District.

Those savings are based upon the current tax rate paid by fire district property owners. Sun City residents are paying \$1.7866 per \$100 of secondary valuation, according to Chief Jim Sebert.

Meanwhile, a commercial establishment valued at \$100,000 would experience an increase from \$262 to \$446.65.

In a fire district, where taxes are assessed by the county, residential and commercial properties are taxed at a different rate, based on the secondary valuation.

A secondary valuation is an assessment of the full cash value at 10 percent for residential property and 25 percent for commercial property.

Mayor Russell said collecting the signatures was a massive undertaking but well worth the effort.

"A tremendous amount of people were involved (in the signature gathering)," Mayor Russell said.

Off-duty fire department personnel were instrumental in gathering signatures, Mayor Russell noted.

"I am so proud of the people of our town," the mayor added.

He noted the annexation process began more than a year ago with meetings involving Chief Sebert and himself.

"The community owes you a debt of gratitude," Chief Sebert said to the mayor. "He has taken on an important project for businesses and citizens of Youngtown, to see that they continue to receive a very valuable service."

"This is a plus for everybody," Chief Sebert said. "They are not changing the department or service, just how it is funded."

Fire board probes Youngtown annexation

by JEFF OWENS
DAILY NEWS-SUN

Sun City fire officials took the first tentative steps Tuesday toward annexing Youngtown into the Sun City Fire District.

Under current rules, the majority of Youngtown property owners would need to approve the annexation via petitions, but fire board officials are awaiting the fate of a proposed law that would change those rules.

House Bill 2102 would alter the petitioning requirements from more than half of registered voters and more than half of landowners, to more than half of the community's qualified electors, based on

the number of votes cast for all candidates in the last gubernatorial election.

"We don't know which way it's going to go," said Sun City Fire Chief James Sebert.

While the Legislature deals with the legislation, the fire board and Youngtown council have decided to take the first step toward annexation — an "impact study" that will redraw the district's boundaries, assess property values, detail tax rate changes and list benefits and disadvantages to both communities.

"It's going to require a little more study and a little more concern," said Sebert, who added annexation is not feasible by this fall and more

likely to occur by July 1, 2001.

Sebert also said he is "hard-pressed" to find any disadvantages to annexing Youngtown — "a customer and good neighbor" — which has contracted with Sun City for fire and emergency medical services for a decade.

Youngtown officials see no disadvantages either, and Youngtown residents will get a chance to voice their opinions on annexation at a meeting at 6:30 p.m. Thursday in the Youngtown clubhouse.

"We're looking forward to presenting to the people the very best options," said Youngtown Councilman Eugene Russell.

Annexation, he added, is "a

great idea for our community. It cements a relationship with the fire district and affords the best possible service at the best possible price."

Sebert said annexation wouldn't result in a tax rate increase in Sun City, but joining a fire district would result in one for Youngtown.

In other action at its Tuesday meeting, the board welcomed new member Edwin George, who replaces Cy Rengel.

"Mr. George's credentials were excellent," said fire board member Brayton Willis.

Rengel had to resign from the board after moving to Peoria recently. He was pre-

sented with a plaque and an affectionate farewell at Tuesday's meeting.

"I personally thank you for your service," said fire board Chairman Irv Mitchell.

Sebert said he would "never be able to say thank-you enough" to Rengel.

Rengel first donned a fireman's hat in 1941 and became chief of the fire department in — no joke — Burnsville, Minn. He had served on the Sun City Fire Board since 1981.

"This is a very fine fire department," Rengel said. "And I say that with personal pride because I probably had something to do with it. I've always had a deep respect for this fire department."

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SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT

9

Sun City Fire District purchases new pumper

By **JOSEPH HALL**
Independent Newspapers

In its quest to deliver the best fire protection possible, the Sun City Fire District has striven to keep its equipment updated and to that end, the district has placed an order for a new pumper truck.

Funds for the \$365,000 purchase will come from the district's capital projects fund. The district will use \$250,000 from the fund as a down payment and the remaining \$115,000 purchase price will be

financed, according to Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

"We are still shopping around for a financier," Chief Sebert said. "I have spoken with several local banks looking for the best interest rate."

The district's board of directors decided to pursue the purchase even though it did not have sufficient cash because the pumper's price has been rising sharply.

"In the last five years the pumper's price has risen over \$100,000," Chief Sebert said. "If we

wait until we have all the cash in the projects fund the price would go up even more. It makes sense to buy it now and not worry about inflation."

Chief Sebert mentioned the department tries "to replace a major piece of apparatus every five years, to ensure quality equipment and service. We planned to have this truck in concordance to the retiring of our current pumper."

The pumper, a Quantum, is manufactured by Pierce Manufacturing of Appleton, Wisc. It can pump 1,500 gallons of water per minute.

Pumpers normally last 15 to 20 years, Chief Sebert noted.

The process of purchasing the pumper began a year ago and will not be complete for another eight months, due to back orders at Pierce Manufacturing and the time it takes to build the Quantum after the purchase is made.

"Pierce will even customize the pumper to provide the level of service that we have set for our community," Chief Sebert said.

SUN CITY FIRE DISTRICT ASKED TO consider serving Citrus Point

Contract or annexation are possibilities for subdivision

By **MIKE RUSSO**
Independent Newspapers

10/3/00

The developer of a subdivision located on a county island immediately west of Sun City has asked the Sun City Fire District to consider providing fire and emergency services for the residential community.

Pulte Homes, developer of Citrus Point, an eventual 332-home com-

munity located on the southside of Bell Road across from the West Valley Art Museum, has asked the Sun City Fire District to consider extending services to the area on either a contract basis or through annexation into the fire district, according to Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

"The Sun City Fire District has already been providing service to the area," the chief said. The service

is being done as a courtesy to residents. The fire district is under no obligation to serve the area.

"This is an opportunity for us to offset our costs without adding manpower or equipment," Chief Sebert said.

Residents of the subdivision are aware that no fire department is

See ■ FIRE SERVICE, Page 3

obligated to provide service to them.

Citrus Point project manager Brad Kettlecamp has said residents were made aware of the arrangements before the close of escrow.

"It was in the public report before they bought," he said. "We are obligated by law to give it to them"

Based on the population estimated for the area at full build-out, fire district officials believe the fire department would respond to three or four calls a month, Chief Sebert noted.

Pulte would like to contract with the fire district for service like the town of Youngtown did before seeking annexation into the fire district. "Then, when the project is completed, they would let the property owners make the decision on annexation," Chief Sebert

explained.

A contractual fee would have to be negotiated. Such factors as assessments to cover vacant lots and houses in various stages of construction would have to be considered, Chief Sebert noted.

Chief Sebert believes it would be advantageous to current residents within the Sun City Fire District to provide service to Citrus Point. Whether on a contract basis or through annexation, revenues would be generated at Citrus Point without the need to add any equipment or manpower, according to Chief Sebert. "We could serve the area out of the main fire station (99th Avenue and Bell Road.) It is only about three miles away," he said.

"Most importantly, we can accomplish this without having to add any more resources," Chief

Sebert added. Yet, it would generate additional revenue.

The chief mentioned the fire district has very little opportunity to expand its revenue base because Sun City is rapidly being surrounded by incorporated communities.

Pulte informed Chief Sebert that city of Surprise is not interested in annexing the area, and the only other alternative for fire protection for Citrus Point residents is contracting with a private firm, such as Rural/Metro.

The drawback is Rural/Metro's closest station is located about a dozen miles, away at 11140 N. 136h Ave.

Pulte would like Rural/Metro to site a station closer to the development but Rural/Metro is reluctant because of an insufficient population base to generate the required revenues.

"If Surprise really does not want to bring them in, we would like to see the annexation explored," Chief Sebert said.

"Annexation is a more viable long-term solution for us," Chief Sebert said. "It allows us to better plan our budget since we can count

on the revenues.

"Also, with annexation, the tax would be collected by the county and that would save us billing costs."

Chief Sebert suggested a community meeting to allow the residents to ask questions.

"We would be happy to host such a community meeting," he said.

"We will try to reach an agreement with Pulte," Chief Sebert said.

The Pulte project is about half complete, Chief Sebert has been told.

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT— MAY 3-9, 2000

Tax refund helps RCSC, hinders Sun City Fire District

By MIKE RUSSO
Independent Newspapers

One Sun City organization recently reaped an economic windfall while another suffered a financial setback as the result of a tax refund issued by Maricopa County.

The Recreation Centers of Sun City, Inc. won a three-year battle with the Maricopa County Assessor's Office and was awarded a refund of \$76,300 plus \$8,000 for tax years 1997, '98 and '99.

That refund resulted in \$12,371.78 in funding being withheld by the county to the Sun City Fire District. That was the fire district's share of the excess tax levied on the RCSC.

"We paid our property taxes

under protest for those three years," explained Harold Boudrie, RCSC treasurer. "We felt our properties were assessed too high." The county finally agreed.

"We have been fighting this for quiet awhile," said a pleased Mr. Boudrie.

However, it is not the loss of funding this year that has the fire district board of directors worried as the potential for reduced funding provided by RCSC taxes.

A state law passed last year provides a hefty property tax break for recreation centers in communities such as Sun City.

The legislation, which became effective Aug. 6, and is intended to provide relief for so-called "residential common areas" — typically buildings and facilities owned and

maintained by non-profit homeowners and condominium owners associations. It excludes golf courses, however.

Starting with tax year 2000, the value of each parcel will be set at a flat rate of \$500, as opposed to tax rates based on the full cash value of each parcel.

In Sun City, which has eight parcels belonging to the recreation centers, taxes are expected to fall from the current \$158,583 to only \$4,000.

The Recreation Centers reduced assessed valuation will have to be made up by the other property owners within the Sun City Fire District, according to Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

Fire district officials are not yet certain how the new legislation will

affect the district.

"They have not identified the parcels yet," said the Rev. Irvin Mitchell, SCFD board chairman.

"We have a rough assessed valuation to work with of \$251,000,000 up from \$243,000,000 last year," he said as the fire district prepares its budget for fiscal 2000-2001.

"What this will do to assessed values is difficult to say," remarked Chief Sebert.

Chief Sebert is concerned about the double-whammy likely to be faced by Sun City residents — increased fire district taxes due to the lowering of the rec centers' valuation and normal inflationary factors that have led to annual increases in recent years.

"That will not sit well with homeowners out here," Chief Sebert.

Can others find your house?

ADDRESS NUMBERS:

Your life may depend on them someday

GINGER SCOTT
DAILY NEWS-SUN

For the past five years, Joe Fly has worked in the Sun Cities and neighboring retirement communities as an independent contractor for the Daily News-Sun.

After visiting thousands of homes in the area each year, Fly, who lives in Vantana Lakes, has noticed a lapse in some safety practices among residents.

Fly noted that many homes are not clearly numbered — a problem when emergency crews need to find a home for someone in need of medical attention, authorities have said.

Fly said he's observed several houses without a number identification, or addresses that aren't lighted to make it easier for authorities to find at night.

He's also seen safety doors that are difficult for even the home's owner to unlock or open, which can make it difficult for

people to get out if there is a fire.

"This is a problem we face all the time," said Sun City Fire Chief Jim Sebert. "We haven't found a door yet that we couldn't get into, but it does slow us down."

Sebert said a Sun City woman died a couple of years ago when her home caught fire and she wasn't able to unlock her security door in time.

"I think she even had the key in her hand," Sebert said. "The smoke had just gotten to her."

Sebert said it's important for people to feel safe in their homes, but they should try to find a balance between security and accessibility.

The best solution is to share keys with your neighbors, he said.

Firefighters do have an alternative to locate houses when numbers aren't visible, Sebert said. But anything that makes it easier to spot a location — such as painted numbers on the sidewalk or the lighted address on the house — will allow firefighters to respond more quickly, he said.

Fire stations are also equipped with large, detailed maps that indicate the exact locations of homes and businesses.

Reporter Ginger Scott-Eiden can be reached by e-mail at Ginger.Scott-Eiden@thomnews.com or by calling 876-2522.

Tips from the Sun City Fire Department on how to make it easier for police or firefighters to respond to a home emergency:

- If an emergency occurs and you are expecting police or firefighters to arrive at your home, have the lights on and be ready to let them in your door.

- If you have a key to your neighbor's house and notice police or firefighters trying to enter the home make them aware you have a key. This way authorities do not have to damage a door or window to get access to the house.

- Share keys with your neighbors.

- Practice unlocking security gates from time to time, so if there is a fire in your home you will be able to get out in time.

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT

DEC. 26, 2001-JAN. 1, 2002

SC Fire District adopts military leave policy

By Mike Russo
Independent Newspapers

The Sun City Fire District took a step last week to ease the minds and financial concerns of employees who may be activated to serve in the military.

Heightened national security has led to many national guard and military reservists being activated since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, including one Sun City firefighter. Another firefighter has received orders to report for active duty in February and three other Sun City Fire District employees are currently serving with the national guard or reserves, according to Fire Chief Jim Sebert.

In an effort to allay the fears over lost wages and benefits by employees who may be activated, the Sun City Fire District

board of directors unanimously adopted a military leave policy during its Dec. 18 meeting.

The policy will allow employees to continue receiving benefits while on active duty and even be compensated for the loss in pay.

"We would allow the employees to continue with their benefits, including medical, while they are in the military," Chief Sebert said.

"This policy will basically allow for seamless coverage for the employee and his or her family. They can continue to see the same doctors they have become familiar with," he continued.

The other major component of the new policy would allow the fire district to make up the difference in the employee's pay between what they will receive on active military duty and what

they would have received on the job as a firefighter.

"Once they are activated, they are federal employees," Chief Sebert explained. They experience a significant decrease in wages, he noted.

The new policy will allow the fire district to make up the difference.

However, before the department would have to make up any pay differential, the employee would be required to use all accumulated vacation and personal leave time, the chief noted.

The employee would still continue to accrue vacation and personal leave days while on active military duty, Chief Sebert noted.

Vacations range from two to five weeks annually based upon years of service, according to Chief Sebert. Five is the maxi-

mum number of vacation weeks a district employee can accrue. The vacations cannot be carried over from year to year.

"After those days are exhausted ... the makeup would occur," Chief Sebert said.

"We want to hold onto our people," he stressed. "We provided them with paramedic and recruit training and we want to protect our investment."

The fire district is required to hold the position of activated military personnel for five years, according to Chief Sebert.

The new military leave policy is based on the city of Phoenix's policy, Chief Sebert mentioned. Glendale has a similar policy, according to the Rev. Irvin Mitchell, chairman of the SCFD board of directors.

SC Fire District ⁹⁻⁶⁻²⁰⁰⁰ tax rate set

Rate rises a little more than 20 cents

By **MIKE RUSSO**
Independent Newspapers

An unexpected decline in assessed valuation has resulted in a tax rate of nearly \$2 per \$100 of assessed value for residents of the Sun City Fire District.

Maricopa County projected in February that the fire district's assessed value would be \$252,251,314 but when the assessments were released recently, the district's assessed valuations totaled only \$244,932,029, which is even less than last year's figure — \$245,188,873.

The decline forced the tax rate up to \$1.9956 per \$100 of assessed value, a rise of more than 20 cents, or 11.7 percent, from last year's rate — \$1.7866. On a home with a full cash value of \$100,000, that would translate to a \$199.56 secondary tax

based on the current residential assessment ratio of 10 percent.

"We are a little disappointed," said Fire Chief Jim Sebert. The assessment reduction "caused our internal projected tax rate to be a little higher than expected; just under \$2 per \$100 of assessed valuation," according to Chief Sebert. "We were anticipating a tax rate of about \$1.90 based upon the preliminary assessment.

"Generally preliminary figures and finals are pretty accurate, but not this time," the chief added.

Chief Sebert said he was not cer-

tain why the district's assessed value dropped but he believes it may have something to do with the Recreation Centers of Sun City Inc., property being devalued.

"We were very disappointed," Chief Sebert said. "With more properties filing (assessment) appeals (such as the Recreation Centers), it is putting a greater burden on the individual homeowner," Chief Sebert said.

The Sun City Fire District's budget for the current fiscal year is \$5,709,174.

SUN CITIES INDEPENDENT JAN. 23-29, 2002

Fence to be built at fire station to halt unwelcome traffic Firefighter safety an issue

By Mike Russo
Independent Newspapers

Motorists looking to shave a few seconds off a trip have been placing Sun City firefighters in jeopardy. But they will soon have their shortcut short-circuited.

Fire Chief Jim Sebert has noticed an increase in the number of vehicles that have driven behind the main fire station at the corner of Bell Road and 99th Avenue to circumvent the traffic light at the intersection.

The fire department uses the property for drills and to perform maintenance on trucks and other equipment, and some of the scofflaws cutting through the lot have come precariously close to hitting firefighters or equipment, Chief Sebert noted.

"We have some security and safety issues relating to traffic passing through the back parking lot," said Ed George, vice chairman of the fire district's governing board.

"We have seen a definite increase in traffic cutting through, especially with the increase traffic on Bell Road," Chief Sebert said.

"We have actually had people drive under the extended ladder truck while we are trying to do maintenance on it," he continued.

"We see cars going through here every day," Mr. George added. "That is unacceptable to us."

Chief Sebert further

See ■ FENCE, Page 7

remarked, "We need that lot for our training and we cannot put our firefighters in jeopardy by having vehicles cut through."

In an effort to alleviate the problem, the board, during its Jan. 15 meeting, voted unanimously to allocate \$20,000 to install an electrically controlled gate and fence on the property to keep vehicles from entering off of Bell Road.

The fence, of a yet to be determined height, will align with the wall of the neighboring APS substation, recessed about 100 feet off Bell Road.

The board also discussed the possibility of installing a fence along 99th Avenue to deter motorists but decided to see first how effective the Bell Road fence will be.

Chief Sebert believes a fence will not be needed along 99th Avenue.

"We get a lot of repeat customers," Chief Sebert said. "They know the access is there, so they use it. Once the gate is installed, it will cut down on their cutting through."

"Security is an issue, but right now, safety is the issue," Chief Sebert said.

The activity is not only dangerous but illegal, noted Capt. Ron Stoner of the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office.

"It is a civil offense," Capt. Stoner said.

"You cannot use private property to avoid a traffic control

device," he added.

Motorists convicted of violating the law are subject to a fine and will have two points tacked onto the driver's license, he noted.

"All moving violations are two points, with the exception of speeding, which is three points; DUI, which is eight, and aggressive driving and reckless driving, are also eight points," he explained.

"It has always been a problem, that is why they made it a law," he continued. "The law is about 10 years old."

Capt. Ron Stoner said the problem of people cutting across private property to avoid a traffic light is as serious a problem as "those who fail to stop at stop signs."

Although the board allocated \$20,000 to the project, Mr. George is hoping it can be accomplished for less.

Some preliminary discussions have been held with members of the Bell Metal Club, which has indicated it may be willing to construct the fence for the cost of materials.

"These people are craftsmen and they would do a great job," said board member Jim Schmidt.

Jack McManamon, a member of the Bell Metal Club, informed the fire district board that the club's board has yet to vote on the matter, but he felt the measure would be approved.