

Hail to the Chief!

By: Jim Oliveri

Anthem and the surrounding communities recently welcomed Mark Nichols as the new chief of the Daisy Mountain Fire Department (DMFD). Chief Nichols, who was introduced to Anthem residents at the May Community Council meeting, brings a wealth of fire-fighting experience to his new position.

Right Man at the Right Time


A long-time Arizona resident, Chief Nichols is well-qualified to deal with his new responsibilities. He and his wife of 34 years, Kerry, have two children in the field of public service as well. Philip is a teacher at Canyon Elementary School, and Traci is a recent nursing graduate. Chief Nichols began his career with five seasons in the Forest Service, and then joined the Glendale Fire Department, where he served as a paramedic for 25 years. Most recently, he was the Training Chief for the Peoria, AZ Fire Department before accepting the assignment with Daisy Mountain. Chief Nichols holds a Masters degree from Arizona State University in Science and Technology, specializing in Fire Administration. His background and experience should serve him well as head of our ever-evolving fire service. "When I came here," said Nichols, "I knew that this department was well-managed and had a good fire board. My job will be to add something positive to that. We've begun by reorganizing the unit to help make us more efficient."

The Department

For those of you who may not be familiar with the Daisy Mountain Fire Department, it consists of 94 personnel

dispersed among four fire stations. The organization is responsible for a fire district encompassing 102 square miles, extending roughly from Carefree Highway to Black Canyon City. This area includes the communities of Anthem, Desert Hills and New River. The firefighters are thoroughly familiar with their territory, since the DMFD roster is comprised mainly of men and women who are local residents. "Our staff is young but highly skilled," said Chief Nichols. "In addition to providing emergency service, we expect them to maintain a close relationship with the community. One of my greatest responsibilities will be to ensure that they receive the training and education necessary to prepare them for the very diverse challenges they will face." To help accomplish that goal, the department cooperates with Maricopa Community Colleges so that firefighters can earn additional college credits. In fact, our new Chief teaches some of those courses.

On any given day, DMFD personnel may be called upon to perform vital functions other than fighting fires. These could include providing emergency medical assistance to victims of accidents and illness, handling hazardous material spills, or even delivering a baby. The department also maintains a Wildfire Division that can be deployed anywhere in the nation, as was the case recently when Daisy Mountain personnel helped battle the forest fires in Eastern Arizona. Participation in public affairs is a requirement as well. DMFD provides fire, safety and CPR training to local children and adults, and can even furnish an honor guard for community functions.



"Saving someone's life is a very rewarding experience," added Chief Nichols. "But on the other hand it can be very difficult to deliver bad news. Unfortunately, 9/11 taught us that we have to be prepared for the worst day of our lives."

(L-R) Dave Jensen, Mike Mattingly, Danny Primera, David Duarte, Mark Nichols, Danny Johnson, Juan Reyes, Alan Zangle, Jeff Petersen, Paul Schickel.

Challenges

The North Valley area presents some unique problems for firefighters. “We have water issues here that other parts of the Valley don’t have to deal with,” said Nichols. In addition, the Chief recognizes that the department must find a way to maintain the same level of service within the budget constraints that affect all public service organizations during difficult economic times. “I want to ensure that everyone continues to get the same level of professionalism from us,” offered Nichols. “It will take a collaborative effort from all concerned to accomplish that. We’re going to have to be more proactive beginning now.”

Looking Ahead

Chief Nichols anticipates many changes in coming years including some additional restructuring. He plans to concentrate on cross-training the staff so that the firefighters under his command will become expert in more than one field. In addition, firefighting techniques keep improving as the pertinent technology develops at an astonishing pace. “We have thermal imaging cameras now to help us find people and pets in a heavy smoke environment,” said Nichols. “But these are already obsolete compared to the new equipment that’s becoming available. I think better technology can only improve our already high standards.”

Somewhere along the line, Chief Nichols hopes to find funding for one of his pet projects, a Crisis Response Van. “It really bothers me when we have to leave a family behind while we transport their loved one to a medical facility,” he said. “Often they have no idea what to do next. A Crisis Response Team would be trained to assist them, even down to such mundane things as finding transportation for them to the hospital or locking up the house.”

Chief Nichols will be recruiting some new personnel to replace a few of the more experienced DMFD staff who are approaching retirement. “I help in the interviewing process,” he claimed. “When all is said and done, I ask myself this question: ‘Do I trust this person enough to deal with my grandchildren?’ That’s often the deciding factor.”

So our new Chief has assumed command with enthusiasm and confidence. “I want to take the department to the next level and eventually hand off a better organization to someone else,” said Nichols. “In the meantime, we’d like the residents of the Daisy Mountain Fire District to understand that we’re part of the community too. They should contact us if we can do anything to help.”

For more information about DMFD, please visit www.daisymountainfire.org or call 623-465-7400.



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