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MOFD board appoints interim chief, retains search firm

By Nick Marnell



Soon-to-be interim fire chief Jerry Lee Courtesy MOFD

The Moraga-Orinda Fire District board of directors named Battalion Chief Jerry Lee as the interim fire chief effective Sept. 20, the day of Fire Chief Stephen Healy's departure. The board also agreed to retain an executive search firm to assist in the recruitment of the new chief.

Consistent with the district's hard-driving push to improve its financial picture, MOFD appointed an interim chief who has procured \$2.9 million in grant funding since his promotion to battalion chief in 2012. Lee secured a \$1.1 million FEMA Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response grant in 2013, which covered the salaries and benefits of four firefighters for two years, and he recently obtained a federal grant to cover the purchase of four power gurneys for district ambulances.

"It's an honor to serve the men and women of MOFD and the community. It's something I've been wanting to do throughout my career in the fire service," Lee said of his future elevation to interim fire chief. Lee has served with MOFD since 2003.

Though he praised the announcement of Lee as interim chief, former MOFD director Dick Olsen, who went through the hiring process of Fire Chief Randy Bradley, urged the board to search as far and wide as possible for the new fire chief, if for no other reason than to confirm that Lee is the proper selection. "It's always best to use an open process," Olsen said. "Over the years, you'll be paying a person more than a million dollars to oversee tens of millions of dollars. It's a pittance of an investment."

After interviewing potential search firms, the MOFD fire chief recruitment ad hoc committee recommended that the district retain Roseville-based Bob Murray and Associates to conduct the search for the new chief. "The company has hired 15 fire chiefs in the last two years," said ad hoc committee member Craig Jorgens. Once executed, the contract with Bob Murray and Associates will not exceed \$24,000.

Director Steve Anderson cast the only vote against retaining the search firm. "I used to own a recruiting company," he said. "We would always allow a carve-out. If you make an in-house hire, you don't pay."

According to the committee, the terms of the financial arrangement with the search firm would remain the same whether for an internal or separately sourced candidate.

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