

Published September 20th, 2017

Spirited assistant chief takes over ConFire operations division

By Nick Marnell



New Assistant Chief Ed Gonzales addresses the ConFire board Sept. 12. Photo Nick Marnell

The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District promoted Battalion Chief Ed Gonzales to assistant chief of emergency operations in a restructuring of the district divisions in August. Gonzales replaces Assistant Chief Lon Goetsch, who takes over the district training division.

Gonzales climbed the rungs from firefighter to engineer to captain to lead the district's busiest battalion, No. 8, since 2014. It makes one wonder how the energetic assistant chief will adjust to the office in Pleasant Hill, away from the action in east Contra Costa County.

"On a day like today, I ask myself that," said Gonzales, waiting over an hour in the lobby for a preceding meeting to end.

Gonzales said that the staffing for Fire Station 16 in Lafayette is a priority, and that the problem with the sewer line at the station site has been resolved with the Contra Costa Central Sanitary District. The fire district expects to reopen the station in November 2018.

ConFire will find out this fall if it receives a federal grant for the hiring of another company at Fire Station 1 in Walnut Creek. "If we qualify, that will help our response into Lafayette," Gonzales said.

The new assistant chief said a huge priority will be to develop the ConFire personnel. "The average age is lower than in any time in my career," said Gonzales, a 28-year district veteran. "There is not a lot of experience among the personnel, and call volumes are going up every year. We have firefighters on the staff who were not even born when I started."

The newest firefighters will not be assigned to the district station with the lowest call volume, Lafayette Fire Station 17, Gonzales said. ConFire does not like to put new firefighters there, as they need to gain experience at a busier station.

Gonzales said that those who choose to work at Station 17 - and not many bid for the assignment - include firefighters who are recovering from injuries, those who have worked at a busy station and may need a down year, and those who are studying for a test. It's the same job, with the same demands, just fewer of them.

Not only will Gonzales spearhead the development of new firefighters, he will also mentor new battalion chiefs. Of 10 battalion chiefs, six will soon be retiring, he said.

Gonzales scored No. 1 on the promotional lists for both his 2003 appointment to captain and his 2014 battalion chief appointment. "I've got a chance to impart my years of operational experience to a new group who can benefit," Gonzales said.

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA