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Spirit of Saint Mary's headed to afterlife

By Nick Marnell



Engineer Chris Davies ends an 11-year relationship. Photo Nick Marnell

in November, when Winnacker negotiated with Saint Mary's College officials and they granted the district an early exit from a 20-year fire apparatus agreement with the school.

In 1999, Saint Mary's College contributed \$650,000 to the district toward the purchase of a 2000 Spartan Fire Truck, the Spirit of Saint Mary's. MOFD agreed to permanently house and maintain the truck and use it on emergency calls from 2001 until 2021. "We don't see an issue that the truck did not last through the length of the contract," said Mike McAlpin, assistant vice provost of the college. "We are proud of our collaboration with the community, and we hope there will be other opportunities for collaboration with the fire district."

Chris Davies was the primary engineer on Truck 41, having become truck certified in 2006 and taking over the controls the following year. He logged 15,000 of the 54,000 miles put on the vehicle.

Davies recalled his most memorable moments on the truck, with the 2017 La Finestra-Lafayette Circle fire atop the list. "It was a very challenging fire for a driver-operator - having access issues, water supply issues, overhead ladder obstructions, exposure issues. This was the kind of call where time in the seat, along with having a very experienced and dedicated crew, came into play," he said.

Some events were maybe less memorable than others. "If you drive a 47-foot, 74,000-pound fire truck long enough, you're bound to have an issue or two along the way," Davies said.

When he was a fairly new engineer, Davies responded to a fire alarm on Crestview Drive in Orinda. Davies was forced to make an even tighter hairpin turn than usual because a car was parked where it should not have been. Sure enough, the right rear of the truck body completely bottomed out and stuck. The crew spent the next 30 minutes working to free the truck. "I didn't make many friends in Orinda that day as traffic was completely blocked from getting through and there were people yelling and screaming at us," Davies said. "Luckily the call ended up being a false alarm."

Davies mused about Truck 41, at times sounding as if he was losing a family member. "T41 was a great piece of apparatus to work on for all those years," he said. "It was a head turner that many children and adults alike enjoyed seeing. Whether it was responding to an emergency, driving in the Fourth of July Parade, or just cruising through town, people always stopped what they were doing to watch T41 drive by. Wherever T41 goes from here, it will be a wonderful addition to its new department and the community it serves."

One of the most popular, larger-than-life personalities of the Moraga-Orinda Fire District has made its last emergency call and will soon be sold to the highest bidder.

The MOFD board of directors authorized Fire Chief Dave Winnacker to dispose of Truck 41, the Spirit of Saint Mary's, as the truck completed 17 years of service and had reached the end of its useful life.

Truck 41 had in fact exceeded its expected lifespan, as trucks normally provide 15 years of service, according to the chief. "This piece of equipment no longer has a place in our response matrix," Winnacker told the board. "It is not even in reserve status."

When the district purchased a new truck, which is deployed at Fire Station 44 in Orinda, the demise of Truck 41 was inevitable. The death warrant was sealed

Reach the reporter at: nick@lamorindaweekly.com

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