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## ConFire captain honored for 40 years of service with the district

By Nick Marnell



Capt. Gil Caravantes, center, with Fire Chief Lewis Broschard, left, and fire commissioner Tom Chapman Photo courtesy Steve Hill, ConFire

The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District, its board of directors and the ConFire Advisory Fire Commission recognized Capt. Gil Caravantes in December for an almost unheard of 40 years of active service with the district. "There is no 40-year pin. We had to special order one," Fire Chief Lewis Broschard said.

Caravantes signed on with ConFire in November 1979, and he worked his way through the system becoming one of the district's first paramedics in 2002, an engineer in 2003 and captain in 2010. He has also worked in various district special programs, like the Hazmat unit and the Critical Incident Stress Management team. Caravantes also served as vice president of Local 1230 of the firefighters union. "There hasn't been a station, except the new Station 16, that Gil hasn't worked at," Broschard said. "But there's still time, and I'm sure he'll end up there soon."

A few notable incidents over the years sum up the essence of Caravantes.

"I was his captain on a house call around the holidays," fire commissioner Tom Chapman said. "An elderly woman lived at the house, which had flooded, and her water heater was seriously damaged. The next day, on his own time and out of his own pocket, Gil brought a new water heater to the woman's home and installed it."

When 9/11 hit, Caravantes, who had friends in the New York fire service, took vacation time and flew back to the city the next day. He spent two weeks assisting New York in recovery efforts, mainly at the center of the destruction. "I would dig and find a picture of a family, maybe from someone's desk, and I'd realize that I wasn't going to find anything that looked like what was in that picture," Caravantes said at the time. He attended more funerals of first responders than he could count. "It took me about five years to get through the national anthem," he said.

A decision the captain made in 2013 as he ran an engine company out of Lafayette Fire Station 17 illustrates his concern for people over bureaucracy. Caravantes' crew responded to an emergency medical call in the city, and based on his analysis at the scene, Caravantes requested mutual aid from the Moraga-Orinda Fire District to transport a young, choking patient to the hospital. The captain's action was in violation of the ConFire contract with its ambulance provider, which relayed that its ambulance was 20 minutes away. "I wasn't comfortable with that," Caravantes said. "We're all about care and safety first." MOFD arrived in 10 minutes and rushed the boy to the hospital. Despite having not followed district protocol, Caravantes said at the time he would do the same thing again "in a heartbeat."

Even with so many years of service, Caravantes shows no signs of slowing down, as he continues to run calls out of one of the busiest stations in the district, Fire Station 5 in Pleasant Hill.

"Thank you very much for employing me for the past 40 years," Caravantes told the board. "It's the greatest job in the world."

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