

# CalCo fire chief leaving to pursue other opportunities

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By Nick Baptista

Calaveras Consolidated Fire Protection Chief Jason Robitaille is stepping down to pursue other opportunities.

Robitaille, who has served as chief the past three years and deputy chief the two before, notified CalCo's Board of Directors Monday evening of his decision.

The board has scheduled a special meeting for May 8 to discuss plans to recruit a new chief.

Robitaille's last day as chief has not been determined. He said he would be available for a smooth transition.

"This has been a wonderful and humbling experience serving as fire chief in my hometown," Robitaille said. "I'm comfortable with what we've been able to do during my tenure."

Robitaille said he is turning his attention to a development venture to benefit the area's senior citizens. He purchased an 18-acre site across State Route 26 from La Contenta Golf Club and is in the initial stages of developing it into a housing project for senior citizens 55 years of age and older.

"It's a real need in our community and it would not be fair to handle that being chief and giving them both 100 percent," he said. "I'm really excited to bring this project forward."

In addition, he and his wife Leah own Valley Springs Physical Therapy.

Robitaille can trace his interest in firefighting back to the days he was a sixth-grader at Valley Springs Elementary School and his father was a volunteer for the Jenny Lind District, a forerunner to today's department.

A 1997 graduate of Calaveras High School, Robitaille moved to the area in 1986 with his parents Darrell and Paula. He can remember the days he came to the old Jenny Lind firehouse with his father for training sessions.

He ended up volunteering himself, and spent a good portion of his nearly 20 years in firefighting associated with the then-Jenny Lind district, rising to the rank of captain before his promotion to deputy chief with the merger of Jenny Lind and Foothill into CalCo and eventually chief.

Following high school graduation, Robitaille attended Modesto Junior College and obtained his associate degree in fire technology while playing football for the school. He continued his education and football at Harding University in Arkansas where he obtained a bachelor's degree in business management.

He returned to California when his wife Leah pursued a doctorate degree at the University of the Pacific and obtained an associate degree in para-medicine at American River College. He applied that training with the Sacramento Fire Department and six years working for a private ambulance company.

He joined the Copperopolis Fire District in 2008 and worked his way up the ranks to captain/paramedic before returning to Jenny Lind and helping guide the district through the consolidation period.

Robitaille in 2015 received the California State Firefighter's Association President's Hall of Fame Award.

He was recognized for his involvement in a statewide firefighter recruitment and retention program. He is a member of a committee administering a four-year, \$2.4 million grant. Implementation of the grant includes live fire training, which has taken Robitaille up and down the state.

The program has helped train more than 1,000 firefighters from San Diego to Humboldt County with the use of a live-fire simulation trailer paid for through the grant. The California State Firefighter's Association is the oldest and largest statewide fire association representing almost 16,000 firefighters from all elements of fire service.