

## **Jenny Lind Fire goes 24/7 paid staffing next month**

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### **By Nick Baptista**

The Jenny Lind Fire Protection District is moving forward to have round-the-clock coverage beginning Nov. 1.

The district's Board of Directors last month approved a plan by Fire Chief Kim Olson to have at least one firefighter at the main station 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The predominately volunteer fire department has two paid positions, with the board's action adding a third.

The department will start a "48/96" work schedule beginning in November where the paid firefighters work 48-hour shifts with four days off so the main station will have at least one paid firefighter on duty at all time.

Olson said the new hire would come from in house.

"We have some very talented people here who are sure to apply," Olson said. "We're extremely fortunate to have such qualified people."

What does the change mean to the community?

Olson said he expects the addition of another paid firefighter and 24-hour coverage will greatly improve response times and in many instances cut them in half.

Instead of volunteers responding to the fire station and getting a fire engine before going to the incident site, they have someone at the station already leaving on the call and can meet the engine at the scene, he explained.

"This will provide quicker and better service to the community," he said.

There is a four- to six-minute window for both emergency medical and fire service, he said, and it's imperative to get to the scene within that time to save a life or keep a fire from getting out of control.

It's the department's goal to reduce response times.

"If it takes us any longer, we're not doing the community any good," he added.

In addition, there is a public perception the department has full-time staffing and on numerous occasions people have come to the station door after 5 p.m. looking for assistance, but nobody was there, Olson said.

That will also change with the addition to paid staff.

With the change, the station will also be involved in the "Safe Home Program." The Station will be a haven for those with issues at home, such as domestic violence. Victims can go to the station and firefighters will notify law enforcement.

The transition to 24-hour coverage was made possible by the board, past boards and past chiefs, Olson said, who were fiscally responsible.

The last payment for construction of the main station was made last year, which frees up \$40,000, and the last fire engine is due to be paid off at the end of the budget year this December, which provides another \$30,000, he said.

The department saved another \$24,000 a year by reducing stipend personnel and will receive \$8,000 a year from the Calaveras County Water District for hydrant inspections.

With the \$102,000 coming back to the district, the district felt comfortable allocating close to \$40,000 a year for the third position, Olson said.

The rest of the savings will go toward replacing fire engines and equipment, such as the district's self-contained breathing apparatus, which need to be replaced by 2019, he said, and cost \$5,000 per unit.

"Our drive is to give the best service to the citizenry as we can," he added.