

Fire Districts Association of California
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Q & A with Pioneer Fire Protection District Chief Robert L. Gill

Robert Gill serves as chief of the Pioneer Fire Protection District located in El Dorado County, Ca. The district provides services through six fire stations with 10 paid firefighters, 12 volunteer firefighters, 17 fire explores/cadets, and a 15-member C.E.R.T. Team to approximately 8, 000 residents. Chief Gill is a 33-year fire service veteran, who has served as Pioneer Fire District chief for the past year. Prior to his arrival, he was chief of Central Calaveras Fire & Rescue Protection District in Calaveras County for six years. He is involved with a number of professional organizations, including the Fire Districts Association of California (FDAC), where he has served since 2005 as a zone director. In 2007, Chief Gill co-authored “Aircraft Accidents, A Practical Guide for Responders”. He’s the **1999 Recipient** of California State Firefighters’ Association and U.S. Safety’s “**Hall of Fame Award**” for contributions to the fire service in general, his community and his department. In a recent interview, he discussed the importance political relationships, future challenges and goals for the Pioneer Fire Protection District.

Q. What is the biggest challenge a fire chief faces today?

A. For special fire districts specifically, I think it’s the diversity of issues fire chiefs have to face. They have to be knowledgeable about finance, government and human resources. It’s necessary to have a significant diversity of experiences and knowledge to address all of the different items that are constantly evolving.

Q. What was your fire district’s biggest accomplishment last year?

A. The formation of the El Dorado County Emergency Services Authority (A Joint Powers Authority) through the El Dorado County Fire Chief’s Association. The organization has a representative from each of the ten governmental fire agencies within El Dorado County. Like most local government fire agencies, we were behind the curve as far as emergency medical service issues and politics were concerned. We were having trouble presenting unified positions to county supervisors and our legislators. We finally developed the cohesiveness to make us effective in the county political arena, which ultimately is very important.

Q. How do you build morale among firefighters?

A. We pride our agency on being highly motivated and providing high levels of service. I think the personal satisfaction people drive from knowing they are doing their jobs well is a very big motivator, initially. From a management point of view, I truly believe in treating employees fairly and honestly in every circumstance and having a completely transparent agency, operationally and fiscally. Also, it is important to lead by example through making good decisions and showing the communities we serve that my position is to be an advocate for the agency, its employees and support staff.

Q. How does your department encourage firefighters to stay up-to-date on new developments and technology in the firefighting field?

A. We do a couple of things. For a rural combination (paid & volunteer) agency, we have company level officers who are dedicated to training all shift personnel, volunteer and our fire explorer/cadet personnel, so it’s a pretty significant time commitment as well as administrative responsibility. Secondly, we have a

strong financial support program for our employees to travel to statewide training opportunities, which we support 100% for both time and cost.

Q. How does your district reach a consensus on controversial issues in a cooperative way? Can you provide an example?

A. Within our organization, we conduct officer and staff meetings where we discuss current events and issues that directly affect the fire district and our personnel. The districts first labor agreement between management and the union; IAFF Local 4586 was ratified in December of 2007 is one example. Change and implementation is difficult for everyone, and in our organization change has brought us into the 21st century stronger than ever as an emergency service provider.

Q. Do you feel political relationships are necessary in running a successful fire district?

A. Yes, political support at all levels of government is critical to obtain monetary support for day-to-day fire district operations. Our local residents see us directly involved in the communities we serve daily, and the legislators have continued to support us, so we diffidently need to continue to network with them and our local media now more than ever during these lean budget times.

Q. What are your goals for the Pioneer Fire District in 2008?

A. To provide the best trained and the best equipped firefighters in El Dorado County. To provide fair and equitable benefits to our employees, while being fiscally responsible. Provide a working environment that's conducive to all, and continue to provide a high level of service to our six communities we serve. Be proactive in the recruitment and retention of our volunteer firefighting and support staffs.

Since 1980, proudly serving the El Dorado County communities of Mt. Aukum, Fair Play, Outingdale, Grizzly Flats, Omo Ranch and Somerset, California

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