

Tahoe-Douglas fire chief calling it quits after 33 years

By Kathryn Reed

“Dramatic changes” is how Guy LeFever describes what he has experienced in the 33 years he has worked for the Tahoe-Douglas Fire Protection District.

The fire chief’s last day is Sept. 2.

His career started in 1975 on a hand crew for Los Angeles County – a crew much like the ones his department uses today for fuel reduction projects.



Guy LeFever

In 1979 he moved to Lake Tahoe, starting at Tahoe-Douglas as a firefighter. Shortly thereafter Nevada mandated ambulances be staffed with paramedics, so he and five others became certified. He worked as a paramedic for a few years before starting up the promotional ladder.

“Working on the ambulance, I think that was probably the most satisfying time in my career ... helping people. Every day was new, every call was different,” LeFever said. “At the time I was pretty young, an impressionable young man.”

Now, at 55, he is the third chief in a six-week span to leave

the Lake Tahoe Basin – a basin with seven chiefs. The others who left are Jeff Michael at Lake Valley and Lorenzo Gigliotti at South Lake Tahoe.

LeFever said it's probably unheard of for three chiefs to depart at the same time. He and Michael are retiring. LeFever didn't even want to broach the issue of South Lake Tahoe's departmental struggles and issues.

One thing that has impressed LeFever are the changes regarding fuel reduction in the past handful of years.

"We've been fortunate we've been able to get defensible space. To get these halos around the community so we don't get a second Angora," LeFever told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The amount of work being done in fuel reduction really is going to have long-term impacts I believe on reducing the fire hazard in the basin."

But he can see the awareness and priority level drop as Angora fades from people's memories.

His constituents after the devastating 2007 Angora Fire voted in a tax just for defensible space/fuel reduction work by his department. Despite the fire being across the state line and no homes in Tahoe-Douglas threatened that June, residents know about fire.

LeFever was a battalion chief when the 2002 Gondola Fire erupted in his jurisdiction. He credits Mother Nature for changing wind direction on the second day so it was blowing down Edgewood Canyon. Otherwise, he's not sure how many houses in the Kingsbury Grade area might have been lost.

About two weeks before Angora his guys were back in Edgewood Canyon because of an electrical fire.

"It just started getting into the trees about 11am," LeFever said. "If you put that same fire at 2, 3 in the afternoon,

Angora probably doesn't happen because everyone would have been on their toes because we would have lost Edgewood Canyon."

During Angora, he was chief of the department. But he was out of town – receiving updates every couple hours.

"We sent our entire department over there – five engines, a water tender. We emptied our entire department over there," LeFever said.

The evolution of mutual aid between agencies in the basin and those in the Carson Valley is something LeFever is proud he's been part of.

With Tahoe-Douglas being responsible for the Stateline casino corridor, it has proven to be interesting at times.

In 1980 during the bombing at Harveys, LeFever was a firefighter and emergency medical technician on an ambulance.

"It was an eye-opener to see military here and operating with the FBI. And our bomb squad was an integral part of that," he said.

As he rose through the ranks, his responsibilities have changed.

LeFever is credited with being good with numbers, saving jobs whenever possible, being frugal, but keeping the level of service people want and need.

"Probably his real strength is he has a talent when it comes to finances," Mark Novak, Tahoe-Douglas fire marshal, said. "He's more proactive than reactive."

In his time as chief, LeFever was instrumental in helping create the fire academy at Lake Tahoe Community College.

"He is a true gentleman. He's always been there when we needed

him. I couldn't ask for a better community partner," Virginia Boyar, who helps runs the program at the college, said of LeFever.

LeFever only has good things to say about the academy and the collaborative effort to make it work – including having several of his guys be instructors.

Another accomplishment of LeFever's is creating the business inspection program at the lake. It gives firefighters an opportunity to see inside a structure before they might be fighting a fire there, and it thwarted Douglas County's attempts to tax businesses at the lake.

LeFever said it's time to go – to let those behind him take over.

"I'm comfortable where the management team is and where the organization is going is positive. If I didn't think so, I would probably stick around longer," LeFever said.

Who will take over for LeFever remains to be determined by the fire district's board. That decision is likely to be announced in October.