

S. Tahoe hires veteran to lead fire department

By Kathryn Reed

A veteran firefighter is now at the helm of South Lake Tahoe Fire Department.

With his new employees sitting in front of him and his peers from other departments standing in the back of the room, Jeff Meston was given his badge from outgoing interim Fire Chief Bruce Martin.



Jeff Meston is South Tahoe's fire chief. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Meston told *Lake Tahoe News* the chance to lead a department with so many young firefighters excited him enough to return to the profession. Plus, since retiring from the Novato department seven years ago he has been living in Incline Village doing consulting work. So, he is already a Tahoe guy. For now he plans to commute to South Tahoe.

South Lake Tahoe has been without a sole full-time fire chief since Lorenzo Gigliotti was asked to leave two years ago. For a while three battalion chiefs ran the department, then Police Chief Brian Uhler headed both departments and for the last

nine months Bruce Martin had the job on a part-time basis.

Martin has bought a house in the area and will be a reserve deputy chief.

“I think he will take over where Chief Martin left off,” City Manager Nancy Kerry said of Meston. “He has had a very illustrious career.”

One of his board members from the Bay Area came to the badge ceremony, commenting on how to this day they still miss Meston.

While these types of ceremonies are common in the fire service, they have been lacking in South Tahoe. Some of that tradition is what Martin helped restore – along with leadership, training and morale.

Meston in his first gesture as fire chief continued that sense of tradition with a moment of silence for Mitch Underhill, a Lake Valley Fire Protection District firefighter who died Sept. 29 at age 34. All of the firefighters in attendance were wearing a black band across their badge to honor Underhill.

Meston has a master’s degree in public administration, is a chief fire officer designee with the International Association of Fire Chiefs, and a graduate of the Executive Fire Officers Program at the National Fire Academy.

He created a citizen disaster preparedness training program for business and homeowners groups that won an International Association of Fire Chiefs National Award, he has served on the state Training and Education Committee, and is a technical expert for the Fireman’s Fund Insurance Company’s Heritage Program.