

Opinion: LV Fire defends ambulance staffing

By Kileigh Labrado

It has been and will remain the mission of the Lake Valley Fire Protection District to provide the highest level of public safety services for our community, its people, and the environment. As our motto states, it is "Because We Care".

Driven by these guiding principles, in 2001 the LVFPD entered into a partnership with the city of South Lake Tahoe to provide fire based ambulance transportation and advanced life support paramedic services throughout the South Shore of Lake Tahoe. For over 14 years the fire district has had the privilege to provide first class fire based emergency medical services (EMS) to our constituents under contracts with the county of El Dorado. LVFPD remains dedicated to providing the highest level of public safety to the community we proudly serve.

The partnership between the Lake Valley Fire Protection District and the city of South Lake Tahoe formed the Cal-Tahoe JPA which currently has a contract with the county of El Dorado to provide paramedic ambulance services to the South Shore until Aug. 31, 2019, with the potential to extend the contract until Aug. 31, 2021. The JPA partnership allowed ambulances to be staffed with firefighter/paramedics in the South Shore, which increased the level of public safety by increasing the number of firefighters on duty every day. Firefighter/paramedics are available for all types of incidents including fires, rescues, and vehicle accidents as well as medical aids.

On Dec. 14, 2015, the city of South Lake Tahoe began staffing the two JPA ambulances they are responsible for

staffing with non-firefighters. While non-firefighting paramedics and emergency medical technicians are qualified to run medical aid calls, they are not all risk personnel and cannot perform the same duties of a firefighter, such as fighting fires, entering burning buildings, performing technical rescues, or vehicle extrication.

There have been ongoing discussion and negotiations between the city and LVFPD regarding LVFPD taking over staffing of all of the ambulances in the South Shore to keep a fire based system intact. Unfortunately there has been no agreement reached to date. The LVFPD is committed to working with the city and the county to find an equitable solution that is in the best interest of the community and maintains the increased level of public safety.

Lake Valley Fire Protection District strongly believes that a fire based emergency medical and ambulance transport service for the South Shore provides our constituents with a proper level of public safety. The fire district believes that the ambulance transport services agreement enhances our ability to maintain an adequate work force that is needed to adequately fulfill our mission and commitment to provide a high level of public safety to the community we proudly serve. Public safety and fiscal responsibility are of the utmost importance to the fire district. It is the intention of the LVFPD to continue to operate fire based emergency medical and ambulance transport services for our constituents.

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