

Fire district spending wisely, assuring coverage

OFFICIALS EXPLAIN DECISIONS REGARDING PURCHASES, RURAL/METRO RELATIONSHIP

By ALAN M. PETRILLO
Special to *The Explorer*

Mountain Vista Fire District officials say concerns voiced by residents at a recent fire board meeting about a fire station closing, and the purchase of land and vehicles, are misplaced.

Scott Butler, Mountain Vista administrative chief, said one issue raised was the potential closing of a Rural/Metro fire station on Magee Road, just west of Oracle Road.

Mountain Vista contracts with Rural/Metro, leasing stations, vehicles, personnel and equipment to provide fire protection within the Mountain Vista district. Mountain Vista does not currently own any fire apparatus, equipment or stations.

"At one time, we had four Rural/Metro stations providing service to us, but currently it's only two," Butler said. "When Rural/Metro signed an agreement with Golder Ranch Fire District to transition fire protection for properties in the town of Oro Valley to Golder Ranch, that agreement called for Rural/Metro to close two of their stations. The station on Magee will be one of those to close."

In response, Earle Ruhnke, chairman of the fire district's board of directors, said Mountain Vista purchased 3.3 acres on Magee Road a half-mile west of the Rural/Metro fire station so the district could construct its own station. Cost of the land is \$500,000, he said, and the district expects to close on the property by mid-January.

Butler said the district studied what was needed in terms of space and equipment, and determined the Magee Road station should be

approximately 19,000 square feet and have four full bays that could accommodate eight vehicles. He noted those estimates are preliminary, and might be modified once an architect is hired.

Mountain Vista, which broke ground on its first fire station on Shannon Road Saturday morning (see related story), was formed in November 2008 from a merger of three adjoining fire districts — North Ranch-Linda Vista, Heritage Hills and La Cañada. In 2009, Mountain Vista annexed 320 properties north of Lambert Lane and Thornydale Road, and later in the year annexed property in Oro Valley from Hardy Road south to the town line.

Phil Richardson, a Suffolk Drive resident who lives in the district's most recently annexed area, raised concerns about the land purchase and fire station closing, but now said he's received a satisfactory explanation about the issues.

Another issue he raised involved the potential purchase of two fire engines, at a cost of \$480,000 each.

"Why are they buying fire engines they won't be using for a year or two?" he asked.

Butler pointed out the board considered the purchase of the two fire engines because it could save money by purchasing them before Dec. 31, 2009. After that date, diesel engines, including those used in fire trucks, are subject to more stringent federal Environmental Protection Agency regulations, which will add cost to the vehicles. Estimates vary, but some fire apparatus manufacturers quote numbers in the \$20,000 to \$30,000 range added per vehicle, Butler noted, depending on the type of engine ordered.

However, Mountain Vista did not purchase the vehicles.

"We do have the capital funds well in excess of the purchase price of two vehicles already set aside, so there would be no rate impact," Butler pointed out.

See MOUNTAIN VISTA, p.39



Dave Perry/The Explorer

Board chairman Earle Ruhnke led the Mountain Vista Fire Department ground-breaking event on Saturday morning.

District breaks ground on its first fire station

By DAVE PERRY
The Explorer

Mountain Vista Fire District formally broke ground on its first fire station Saturday morning, with a vow to provide improved emergency response to areas of the Northwest close to its Shannon Road location.

"This is history-making for Mountain Vista Fire District, and especially for its residents," said Earle Ruhnke, chairman of the district's board. "This is the first fire house in this area."

Mountain Vista Fire District Station 1 is being built on district-owned land at 9310 N. Shannon, north of Hardy Road and north of the Omni Tucson National Golf Resort. The 11,500-square-foot station will have capacity to house 11 firefighters, with 2-1/2 bays for apparatus and equipment, and room for expansion if needed.

"We don't have a facility in this area," said Scott Butler, Mountain Vista's administrative chief.

"We'll have coverage for this area that hasn't had the best coverage in the past," said Jerry

Phillips, treasurer of the board.

The location "really fits nicely" in relation to other stations, Butler said. "There will be a network of resources available to the community, no matter who the organization is."

WSM Architects is the designer of the building, to be constructed by Lloyd Construction. Ground has been scraped, and the contractor plans to start building this week. Completion is expected by August 2010.

When the facility is operational, it will "obviously, decrease response times, and provide more staffing and more supportive working conditions," Butler said. He mentioned specifically the station's facilities to help firefighters cleanse themselves and equipment of blood-borne pathogens and biohazards. "It will keep them and their families a little safer," Butler said.

Mountain Vista has a contract with Rural / Metro to provide firefighters, emergency medical technicians and equipment. James Stoltenberg, Rural / Metro assistant chief, told the crowd his company is "very excited to see this station opened. We look forward to many years of continued service with Mountain Vista."

BLOTTER

POLICE REPORTS

On Saturday, Jan. 9 at 7:30 p.m., officers with the Oro Valley Police Community Action Team served a search warrant at a home on the 12000 block of North Yellow Orchid Drive in reference to possible sale of marijuana. Police had received information that someone at the address was selling marijuana to local high school students. Surveillance of the property revealed traffic consistent with drug sales. Police then made a traffic stop on a vehicle that had left the home. A passenger in the vehicle, a 15-year-old Ironwood Ridge High School student, was found in possession of marijuana. The youth told police that he had just bought the marijuana at the home on Yellow Orchid. Police used the information along with observations to get search warrant. During service of the warrant police seized marijuana, drug paraphernalia, evidence of attempted marijuana cultivation, plastic baggies, a scale, syringes and anabolic steroids. Police arrested the suspect who was booked into Pima County Adult Detention Center on charges of sales of marijuana, possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia.

On Thursday, Dec. 31 at 2:30 a.m., Oro Valley police responded to a call of a possible counterfeit bill used at the Walmart store at Oracle and Magee roads. A store employee told police that a man attempted to buy cigarettes with a \$100 bill that appeared suspicious. The store employee told the man that she could not accept the bill. The man then produced a second \$100 bill that also appeared unusual. The employee told the man that she would have to keep the bill and call the police. The man remained at the store until police arrived. He told officers that he worked at a nearby fast-food restaurant and got the money after he cashed his paycheck at the same Walmart store around Christmas time. The man said he also attempted to use the money at restaurant and was told he could not pay with the suspicious bill. Police took the man's information and took possession of the suspicious currency. He was told the bills would be put into evidence for further investigation. No arrests were made.

KYL IN OV FOR TOWN HALL MEET THIS WEDNESDAY

Arizona Republican Sen. Jon Kyl is coming to Oro Valley for a town hall meeting this Wednesday, Jan. 13.

The public event, put together by the Tucson Tea Party, runs from 6 to 7 p.m. at the Oro Valley Church of the Nazarene, 500 W. Calle Concordia.

"Senator Kyl looks forward to such forums as a chance to hear directly from citizens and to respond to questions and concerns about what's happening in Washington, D.C.," according to a release from his office. "Topics such as health care reform and the economy are likely to be on the minds of most in attendance, but the discussion will be open to all issues."

"We appreciate the senator's willingness to meet with us in person," said Jennifer Humphries, event coordinator for the Tucson Tea Party.

ROAD REPORT

Projects that will possibly slow your ETA - so be watching!

Arizona Department of Transportation

INTERSTATE 10, TWIN PEAKS INTERCHANGE

- Eastbound I-10 was reduced to one lane from Avra Valley Road to Cortaro Road last week.
- Through this Thursday, Jan. 14, at 5 a.m., westbound I-10 is being reduced to one lane from Cortaro Road to Avra Valley Road.
- The westbound I-10 on-ramp at Cortaro Road is closed through Jan. 14 from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. Traffic is being detoured onto the east-

bound frontage road to use the Ina Road westbound I-10 on-ramp.

- This Friday, Jan. 15 at 10 p.m. through Monday, Jan. 18, at 5 a.m., the westbound I-10 on-ramp at Cortaro Road will be closed. Traffic will be detoured onto the eastbound frontage road to use the Ina Road westbound I-10 on-ramp.

- Westbound I-10 is reduced to one lane from Cortaro Road to Avra Valley Road from Friday, Jan. 15 at 10 p.m. through Monday, Jan. 18 at 5 a.m.

INTERSTATE 10: TOWN OF PICACHO TO PICACHO PEAK ROAD

Eastbound I-10 milepost 213 to milepost 219

- Beginning at 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. nightly through Thursday, Jan. 14, eastbound I-10 from milepost 213 to milepost 219 is scheduled for intermittent lane closures for milling and paving. One lane of traffic will remain open at all times.

Pima County Department of Transportation

LA CAÑADA: INA ROAD TO CALLE CONCORDIA

KE&G, the contractor for the Pima County Department of Transportation, is setting up a new detour along the intersection of La Cañada and Ina Road. It is expected to be in place for three weeks.

Beginning Tuesday, Jan. 12, eastbound and westbound traffic on Ina Road is being shifted to the eastbound lane on Ina. Traffic will be detoured one lane in each direction for Ina Road at the intersection.

Northbound and southbound traffic will be shifted to the northbound lane of La Cañada. Traffic will be detoured one lane in each direction for La Cañada at the intersection.

The speed limit will be reduced to 25 miles per hour along the entire project limits.