Fully manned fire unit operating in Salem

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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SALEM — Since the inception of the Salem Fire and Rescue Department the operation has been all-volunteer.

That's no longer the case, however, and Mayor Diane Head is thrilled.

Thanks to a recently awarded fire contract from the county, Salem has $199,500 to invest in its fire department.

The town has already hired Kevin Wilbanks as chief, Chris McGaha as assistant chief, and Dan Neighbors as firefighter staff.

"We have another four applicants, narrowed down from 10, that we will hire from them for two more part-time firefighters," said Town Clerk Kim Alexander. "That should happen at next Tuesday's council meeting."

According to Head, out of nine calls made since the new hires were added to the payroll, the department was manned seven of them.

"That really cut down on our response time," Head said. "and made a big, positive difference."

When it comes to left reserve funds, Alexander said some physical improvements have already been made.

"Chief was in here yesterday, talking about some maintenance projects for the department and we are looking into other improvements," she said.

Head said that their latest purchase was a new cascade system, which fills air tanks and improves efficiency.

"We've also just added seven new full sets of turnout gear for responding firefighters," Alexander said.

The contract with the county is for one year.

"We keep applying for grants in addition to this money," Alexander said. "We are just focused on keeping this department a township department for the safety of our citizens."

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